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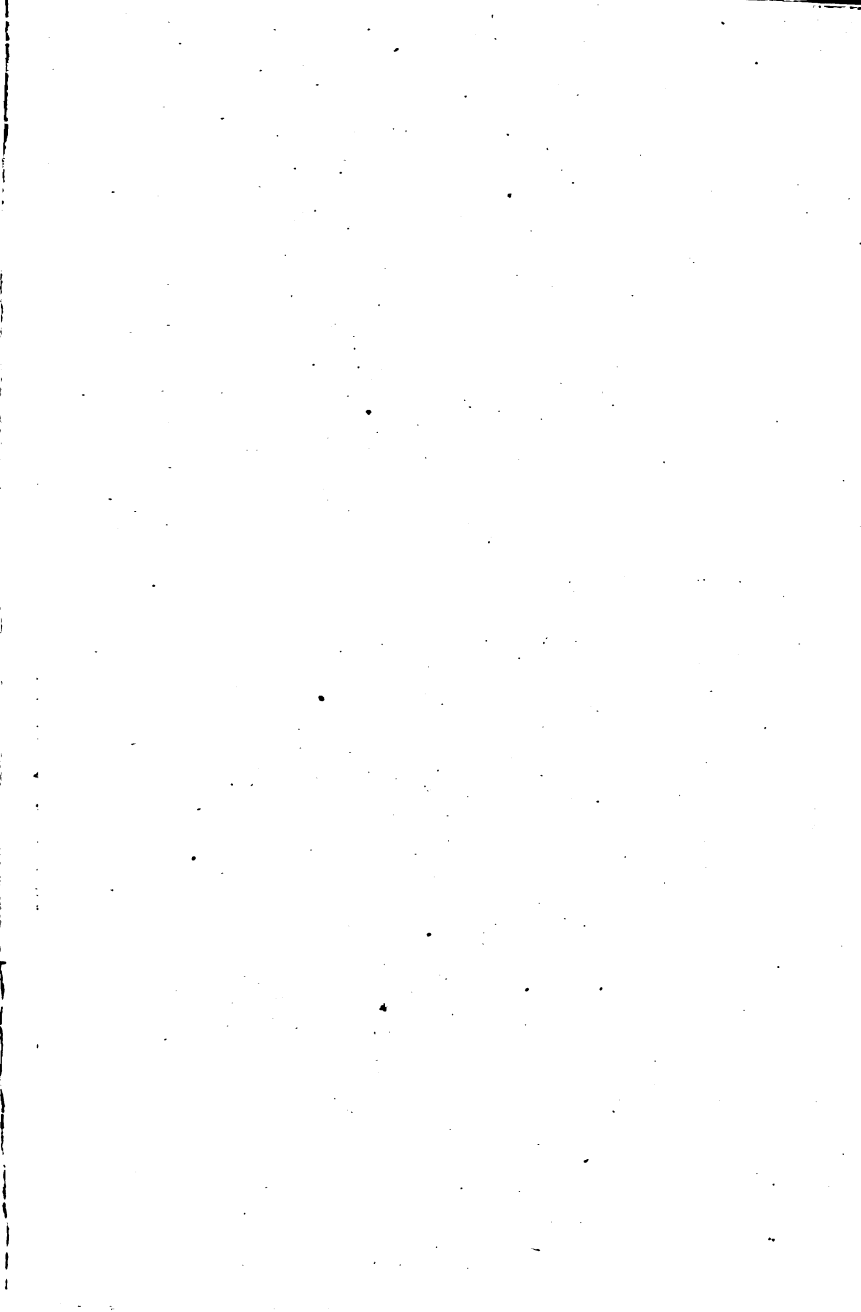
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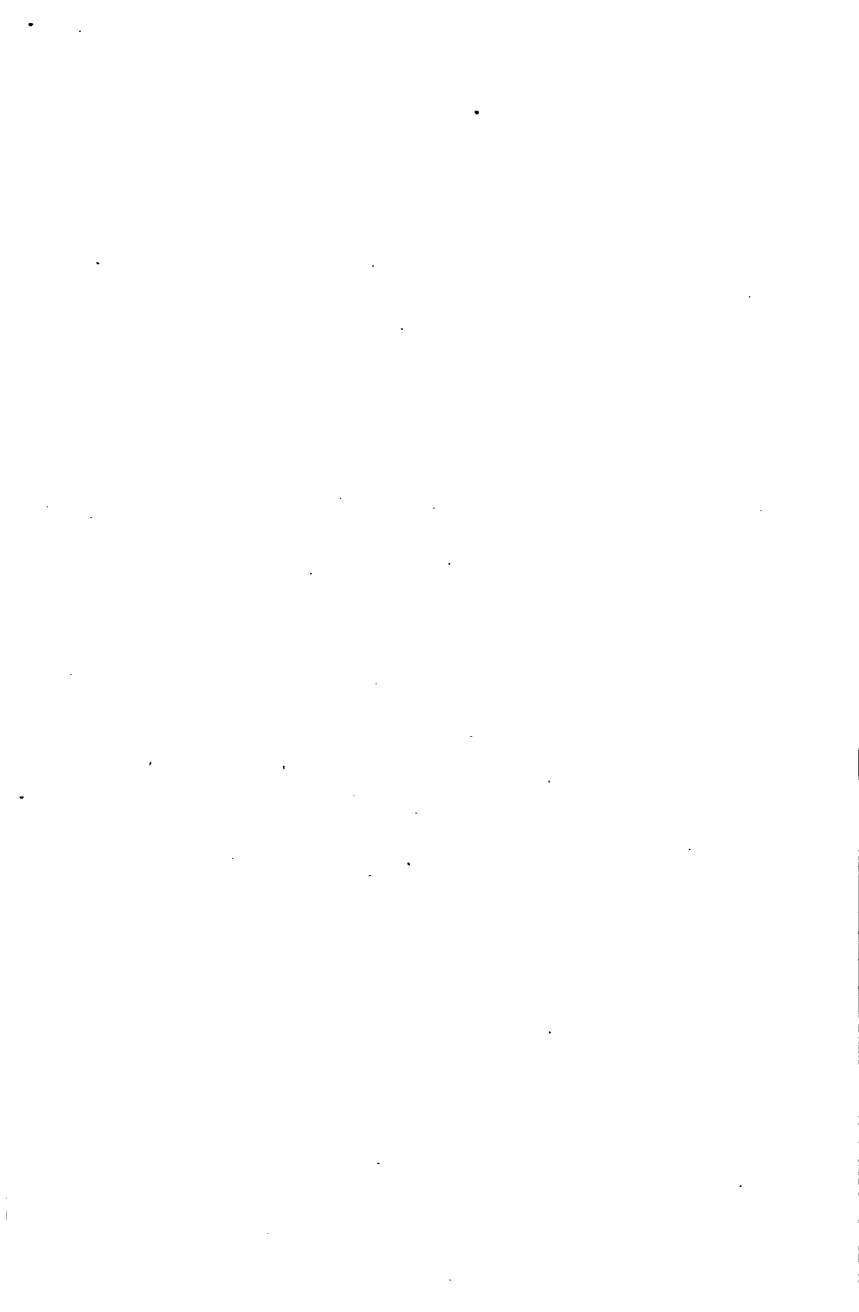
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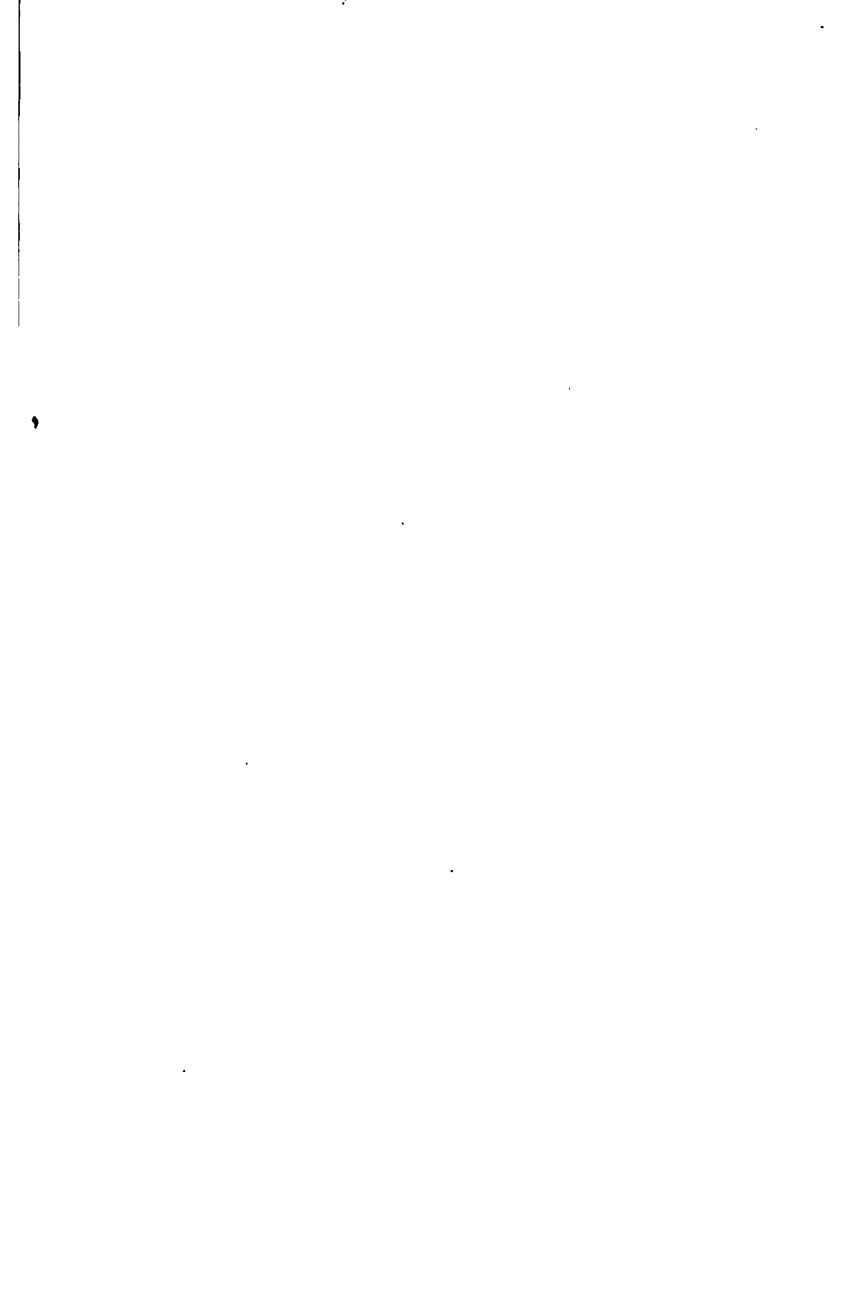
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RUTH GARDEN.

BY UPHILL PATHS;

OR,

WAITING AND WINNING.

A Story of Work to be Done.

BY

E. VAN SOMMER,

Author of "Lionel Franklin's Victory,"

&c. &c.

"Trust Him to govern then;
No King can rule like Him:
How wilt thou wonder when
Thine eyes no more are dim
To see those paths which vex thee,
How wise they were and meet!
The works which now perplex thee,
How beautiful complete!"

London:

T. NELSON AND SONS, PATERNOSTER ROW.

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1883.

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Preface.

VERY few words are needed to introduce this volume: it is a story of every-day life and every-day struggles; of the work that is done and the work that is left undone by those who are treading "Uphill Paths."

In spite of all that has been accomplished by united action or by personal effort for the benefit of others in the present age, the undertone of restlessness from the masses, the wail of want from the individual, are still unsilenced. Different doubtless in intensity, but arising from the same causes, they meet us alike in the stagnation of the village and in the turmoil of the city; and hearts that think must listen and question. It is not a cry for fresh organizations or for more societies; it is not for position, it is not for money: it is just for the one thing that costs too much to be given freely—for the unhindered sympathy of a human heart.

By the hopes we raise and then disappoint, by the hand we extend and then draw back, by the short

measure of our sympathy and the frailty of our friendships, we daily add to the number of the disappointed and distrustful. It is because of the work left *undone* and the words left *unsaid* that the young especially are sent out into manhood and womanhood with hungry hearts, and with a bitter feeling against those in whose hands they unwillingly acknowledge that the power to help them yet rests.

If the lives here depicted may be taken as typical of those which daily cross our paths, they may, perhaps, point to work close to our hands which is yet neglected, and may make us careful that the gifts we offer shall not, by their incompleteness, injure instead of aiding those to whom we would be friends.

E. V. S.

ZERMATT, *August 1883.*

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BY UPHILL PATHS.

CHAPTER I.

BY THE RIVER-SIDE.



STREET-DOOR banged, and a boy stood outside with a flushed, angry face. He paused a minute on the step, the setting sun shedding its golden rays over his bare head; then he dashed away at a rapid pace, heedless of what passers-by might think or where his feet were carrying him. There was a sound of crying and confusion, a sound of angry voices and violent language in the house that he was leaving, and the lad fled away from it all,—on, on, with the one thought in his head, that he hated every one and every one hated him. At last he reached the river-bank, and flung himself down by the flowing water, almost feeling as though he must drown thought or drown himself. Every nerve was at its fullest tension; his veins were swollen with the angry blood

that was rushing through them; and he beat the ground with his closely clenched hands as he lay on the grass.

On flowed the sparkling river, swiftly, silently, away to some great city, perhaps to busy docks where ships were fitting for sea. Why should he not follow it, and cut out his fortune in unknown cities?

Let us look back for a minute into the home the boy has left, and open again the door he closed so hastily. There is still a sound of crying within. A girl of fourteen is standing by the window wiping her eyes and looking sulkily away from the others. A woman with a flushed face is still talking loud and fast, and she is answered by another girl, who seems heedless how she speaks or whom she speaks to. Now and again the man at whom they both appear to be talking gives back an angry reply. The only silent one is a boy of twelve, who is sullenly pulling off his boots, looking as if, though speechless now, he too had added to the general clamour.

"Go home," says the voice of duty to the boy who lies on the river-bank. "Go home!" he repeats to himself in bitter tones. "Home! What is that? A small house, two dingy rooms, angry voices, unsympathetic minds. Go home!"

He was the culprit; he, Fred Fraser, had been the cause of the angry scene from which he had fled, and going back would be sure to excite again the stormy feelings his conduct had aroused.



DRIVEN FROM HOME.



Fred's father was traveller for a small firm in Bransdale. He had in past years occupied superior positions of the same description in London; but owing to his own extravagance, and other causes which he was equally unwilling to acknowledge, he had sunk in the social scale, and had to content himself with an inferior position and a far smaller salary.

Mrs. Fraser, whose sharp voice now echoed in unmusical tones through her small rooms, had also known better days. Previous to her marriage she had been a nursery governess in gentlemen's families, and her taste had been refined and her tone of thought elevated by the influences to which she was there subjected. It was only by slow degrees that she had become contented to see her rooms untidy and her husband's and family's comfort neglected.

Annie, the eldest girl, and Fred had been born during days of prosperity, and had been better educated and better trained than the younger ones. They had pleasant memories to look back upon, pleasant days in their lives that they could recall; and these made the present far more bitter to the boy who then thought of them down by the river-side.

Having educated Fred as well as lay within his power, and thus rendered him fit for a better situation than many lads of his class, Fraser had apprenticed his boy to one of the leading cabinetmakers in the town. After serving there for a year, the firm had failed, and Fred was thrown out of employment.

Since then he had never obtained a permanent situation, his father having set his mind upon his getting a post in one of the railway offices, for which there was a competitive examination. Fred had been even more eager about it than his father; it was the sort of place that he coveted and for which he knew himself to be suited.

He had that day heard that he had failed, and in bitter disappointment had gone home to tell them so. But instead of sympathy and encouragement, he had met with harsh upbraidings and unjust accusations. "It was all his fault: he did not care how hard his father and mother worked, so long as he was clothed and fed: he always had been an expense, what with his fine education, and then wasting his time in looking out for situations above him." It was the mother's voice that uttered these things. Fraser said little: his disappointment was the greater; but he recognized what his boy was suffering from his failure, and so was silent.

Fred knew that he had honestly tried his best; but he had been brought into competition with those superior to him in every way, and it was no fault of his that he had failed. He had told his mother so in vehement, angry language, and his father had interfered on his behalf. This had caused the sad scene of strife and clamour from which Fred had fled. Loud words passed between the husband and wife; first one child and then another had joined their

voices in the general hubbub, till Fred had risen from his seat, flushed with passion. If he had been a burden, he would be one no more; if he was an expense, they should feel it no longer. He would go, he would enlist, do anything; but his mother should never have cause to complain again of him. These were the last words he uttered as he flung himself out of the room; and he repeated them again and again as he watched the flowing water down by the river-side. Yet still across the crowd of passionate thoughts the voice of duty made itself heard—"Go home."

Did it not almost sound to him as though those words reached him in lisping childish tones? Was it not as though golden-haired Willie was calling him back? Then, again, did they not change into manlier accents and his father's voice ring in his ears with the kindly tones of days gone by, "Come back, my boy, and try again"? Fred almost fancied they did, and he deafened his ear to them, closed his heart, and would not listen.

The sun sank slowly behind a bank of cloud; the evening mists gathered over the river; twilight deepened into darkness;—and still he stayed there, turning, as it seemed to him, into stone. His passion died away, his mortification ceased to trouble him—the future was nothing, the past a blank. Alone, forgotten, forgetting, dark hours rolled over Fred down by the river-side.

CHAPTER II.

THE BRIDGE.



QUARTER to nine—nine—a quarter past.

Through the still, sultry air came the sound of the striking of clocks from the town behind him. Fred rose, not because he had any intention of going anywhere, but because the sound, though he hardly listened to it, conveyed an idea of the flight of time, and from mere habit he roused himself into activity.

Fred Fraser was a pleasant-looking lad, now sixteen years old. He was tall for his age, and restless in his movements. The expression that usually rested on his face was troubled, almost discontented; but it would clear away into such a sunny smile that those who had noticed it would wonder if they had been mistaken. He looked superior to his position, and was of that stamp that many who knew him felt he was capable of rising, and possessed an energy that would carry him through difficulties and disappointments. His clothes were shabby, even ragged here and there, and he was painfully conscious of

this ; but they could not hide a certain gracefulness of figure that made any one who observed him notice what was pleasant in his manner and forget his dress.

Having moved from his position, Fred walked restlessly to and fro, with his hands in his pockets and his eyes bent on the ground — backwards and forwards, while the darkness grew deeper, kicking away loose stones from his pathway, thinking, debating, arguing with himself. Presently from the river-bank he went up on to the bridge, and stood leaning over the parapet looking down into the cold silent water.

Nothing of the conflict raging within could be read from his stooping shoulders and motionless form as he stood there, yet something in him attracted the notice of a passer-by. Whatever it was, the gentleman crossed the road, and stood watching him for a few minutes, then touched him. Fred turned and started to see a stranger by his side.

"It is late for you to be out here," he said. "I have watched you for some time. I do not like to see lads loitering about at this hour ; it looks as though they had no home to go to."

"I have a home, thank you," Fred said a little coldly, "but not a home to go to," he added to himself ; and he thought the stranger would go. But some of the sad things he had been thinking lately were still written on his face, and the kind-hearted man felt loath to leave him.

"You may be glad of that," he said. "Only last week I noticed a lonely figure on the bridge standing as you were to-night. I passed and repassed, and then went away and left him. All night long the memory of that man haunted me, and in the morning I read in the paper that, burdened by debt and anxiety, he had committed suicide, and was found drowned! You won't wonder after that that I spoke to you. What I *might have done* that night has preyed upon me since. I cannot tell why you are here to-night, but if trouble of any sort is making you linger outside your home, do think of others more than of yourself—don't take a step that you know must bring remorse." Fred stood silent, just a little indignant at being so addressed by a stranger; but his generosity quenched the feeling, and he liked this man who had cared to speak to him. The gas-light at the far end of the bridge was hardly strong enough to show what he was like, but he saw that he was tall and dark and strong. A huge black dog stood by his side, and even while he was speaking his hand rested on its noble head.

The momentary pause was again broken by the stranger.

"Can I help you?" he said; "will talking things over set them straight? I cannot help seeing you are angry and sad about something."

The strong calm tone roused a great wish in Fred that he *could* tell him, but it was not possible; to

make him understand, he must go back a long way and tell of things he never spoke of to any one. He would not be the one to reveal family secrets, not even now that he had left them all, and, as he thought, was going back no more. He shook his head, muttering an indistinct "It did not matter," looked up for a minute to see if he had offended this unknown friend, and turned away again towards the river. The gentleman seemed to understand the under-current of feeling, and he did not press him further, but after a moment's debate with himself, said in a hearty manner,—

"I cannot leave you here, or else you will haunt me too all night. Shall we walk over the bridge together?"

Fred could not but consent; and as they went the stranger learned from him that he had a home and parents, a brother and sisters, and caught a glimpse of the reason why at that late hour he kept away from them all. He did not extract these details from him, only as he talked Fred yielded to his influence, and they seemed to come out naturally; and he exerted himself to dissuade the lad from following the path he was choosing in his wilfulness. He flattered himself he had succeeded, and when the time came to part, held out his hand, saying kindly, "Where do you live? I shall want to see you again, especially if you are in trouble." Fred told him, while he on his part handed him a card with his address.

"Good-night," he said, and then, as though confident of an affirmative answer, "You are going home?"

Fred looked up at him, a gleam of fun and amusement breaking through the gloom of his expression, and said in a resolute voice, "No, sir."

Harry Carden—for such was the name on the card Fred held in his hand—looked down at the boy. He had thought he understood him, but his thoughts and feelings while Harry spoke to him were very different from what he would have been inclined to ascribe to him. Nobody in all his life had ever cared to speak to Fred like this before; no one had ever heeded his troubles and drawn near to him as this gentleman had done. It was a perfectly new experience. And yet he did not want to be helped; there was not one wish in his heart to do right just then. Right to him was everything that was disagreeable, religion everything that was dry. It was no good trying, and no good thinking; he would not care.

"Lad, what are you going to do then? what will this lead you to?" Harry was saying earnestly; but a sudden fear had come into Fred's heart that this stranger would *make* him care, that in spite of himself he would begin to want to do right. So he turned from him, not uncourteously, for he lifted his cap, but quickly and decidedly, so that Harry could not recall him. He made a hasty step, as though to follow; but Fred was fleet of foot, and a few turnings hid him hopelessly from view.

CHAPTER III.

NIGHT-TIME FOR HARRY.



HARRY stood for a moment almost bewildered, irresolute. There seemed nothing for him to do; and yet he wanted to make some effort to save the lad, into whose life he felt he had been suffered to bring a new influence of some sort.

He had watched Fred's face as he had talked to him: he had seen in it some sudden hope that words of his had evidently aroused; he had seen that hope crushed back by a determination to utter no word that should reveal the secrets of his life; and he felt attracted to him.

The circumstance that he had narrated to Fred had disheartened him the previous week; and now that he saw the lad disappear down the narrow street, he felt as though again he had left something undone. However, his opportunity for that night had passed from him, and whistling to his dog to follow, Harry walked quickly homewards. At the present time he was lodging alone. He had

had an offer of a pleasant home with his married sister, who also lived in Bransdale; but solitude suited him better, so it was into an empty room that he carried his thoughts and perplexities when his walk was over—or rather it was into a room that he thought to find empty, for as he opened the door a figure rose out of the depths of an arm-chair, and a voice exclaimed,—

“At last! Here I’ve waited hour after hour; I’ve been to sleep twice, read the whole of the newspaper, played every piece I know on the piano; and now you don’t even say you are glad to see me. That’s a way to treat a fellow the first day he sets foot in England!” The words were all poured out before Harry was fairly in the room, and there was a strange mixture of doubtfulness with the gladness in his friend’s face.

“Philip, dear lad! where have you sprung from?”

If a welcome were needed, Harry’s voice and manner said all that heart could desire, and there was no mistaking the genuineness of his greeting. The warm grasp of his hand was followed by a quick, anxious glance.

“Are you better, Philip? Has this long absence done all we hoped for you?”

“Look at me, Harry, and answer for yourself.”

Philip drew himself up. He was far the younger of the two, a little the shorter, and a contrast in every way. His figure was boyish, and so was his

face; but his bearing was manly, and there was an air of self-reliance about him that dispelled any idea of weakness that his only too apparent delicacy of constitution might suggest. Harry looked at him affectionately, admiringly. He could see his shoulders were broader than when last they parted; sun and sea-air had darkened his complexion; but he read the answer Philip would not give—this year of travelling had *not* done for him what they had hoped. Though he tried to hide his disappointment and anxiety, Philip saw and answered it.

“Harry, what a fellow you are! The home world thinks I am splendid, and every one says how well I look. But it cannot be helped. I tried ever so hard to get well; but I took cold or something—I don’t know what happened exactly, only I was awfully bad. I would not write because—”

Philip lingered a moment, and his eyes did not meet those bent upon him.

“Could you not trust me, then?” Harry asked.

“I could not trust you not to come. I knew that if you knew all, as quickly as steam could bring you you would be by my side.”

“And yet you would not tell me.”

“Harry, I could not break in upon your life again and unsettle you, not after all that had gone, and the way I treated—”

“Let us leave that, Philip; we do not want that part of our past brought back; it is gone for ever.”

Harry's tone was too decided for Philip not to acquiesce; and he understood those few brief words to mean, "Gone, and for ever, because forgiven." He at once threw aside whatever it was that had shaded his pleasure at this meeting, and went on with his story.

"It was harder work alone, of course, but I did pull through; and as soon as I had the strength for it, I turned homewards. I hardly thought I should ever see any of you again."

The laughing blue eyes were grave now. It was evident Philip was recalling what he still could scarcely think of calmly, and he checked Harry's reply.

"No; don't talk about it, not to-night. Here I am, and all I want to do is just to realize it. Liverpool, Monday; London, Tuesday; Bransdale, to-day. I could not feel it was true, and America only a memory, till I had seen you all."

Thoughts of Fred, of homeless boys and lonely men, were laid aside, and for long hours Harry Carden and Philip Langton talked of all that had happened since they last met, and a firm hand drove away all traces of any shadow of past sorrow that had sought to intrude itself.

The strong friendship that existed between these two had been formed many years ago. In school days, when Harry was finishing and Philip beginning his course, they had first met. Philip's home was in

Australia, and at the age of fourteen he had been sent to England to be educated. He had travelled in a sailing vessel; and coming without friends, in charge of the captain, the boy had run perfectly wild. This absolute liberty, and the fact that in the home he had left he had been an only and much indulged child, rendered Philip little prepared for the life and discipline of an English school. He resented the restrictions laid upon him, broke the rules, and was fast earning for himself a bad name when he first crossed Harry's path. His school-fellows had not been slow to discover how sensitive a point his colonial pride was. In a minute they could bring an angry flush to his face, and draw forth a hasty word, if not a blow, by some slighting allusion to the land where he was born. They did not fail to avail themselves of this; and from being hot and hasty, Philip was almost becoming moody and revengeful when Harry became his friend. It was no act of condescension on young Carden's part. It is possible that his first thought may have been, "This friendless lad wants a friend and a helping hand;" but he no sooner began to know Philip than he learned to like him thoroughly. The boy turned to him with all that gratitude and love that a younger feels to an elder who, as it seems to him, stoops to notice him; and the whole current of his school-life was changed. Philip's naturally bright, genial manner came back to him; and though he was incessantly

in disgrace and difficulty of one sort or another, he had some one to turn to of whose unwavering friendship he was sure, and whose strong hand would lead him out of them by the right, straightforward way. Harry would often take him home with him for the holidays; and afterwards, when Harry had begun the more serious work of life, and Philip was left to finish his course at school and afterwards at college, he always had a home wherever his friend might be.

Two years ago news had come that the Australian home was broken up. Mrs. Langton had died of consumption, and her husband was returning to spend the remainder of his days in England. Philip had turned to his friends in his trouble, and as they heard how, while comparatively young, his mother's life had been cut short by disease, the fears they had always entertained for the delicate boy quickened into more constant anxiety. These fears had proved only too well grounded, and a winter of unusual severity had shown to Mr. Langton that London was not the place where he might hope to see his son grow stronger. He shrank from parting with him to return to Australia, as the doctors had urged; and thus it was that for a year he had been travelling in America, hoping there to gain the strength which would enable him to look forward more hopefully to manhood.

Harry had missed the bright presence of his friend sorely. It is true that of late years they had

not seen each other so constantly. Harry was a busy man; and though Philip had not yet settled to any occupation, other engagements often kept him for long months from paying Bransdale a visit. There was always the possibility of his appearing, however. He came without warning, and Harry never knew, when he returned home at night, but what he might find him awaiting him, as he had done that evening. He was the sunshine of a life that would otherwise have been almost too uniformly grave. Caring for Philip, and knowing him as Harry did, had made him care for others too. It had trained him to feel a responsibility for the lives of those around him, and had fitted him with the power to notice and to think, as he had done for Fred that night.

"If you had never let me know you," Philip would often say, and then draw a dismal picture of what would have followed. So what he had been to one Harry felt he might be to others; and in learning all that it meant to be a friend to this one who trusted him so completely, he had learned to recognize the need of the lonely ones who from time to time crossed his path, and to wish to supply it.

CHAPTER IV.

NIGHT-TIME FOR FRED.



RED meanwhile was speeding through the streets, wondering why he did not feel as bad as he wanted to, and yet unable to shake off this new influence that had come into his life. He could not feel so utterly alone as he had done; for the gentleman had spoken as though he really cared, and as though, if no one else did, he would grieve that he should choose the wrong. Right did not look quite so repulsive, for he had spoken of it as manly and brave. Fred looked at the card again, then thrust it into his pocket, and in five minutes he was again following out his own train of discontented thoughts. For it was only a passing impulse, only a sudden yielding to a sympathy that no one had ever expressed to him before; and though, for a time, it stirred undefined longings within him, it came and it went again. So Fred wandered on, one of the many boys alone in those crowded streets who spent their time there because they had nowhere else to go—boys of whom we say they

never think and never care, and so we train them to thoughtlessness and carelessness. Little those around them know of the sudden storms of feeling that sweep over them from time to time. Sudden dissatisfaction with themselves and all around, a sudden groping after something that will satisfy and help them, and then it all passes away. At home they are called cross for that day or that hour, at work they are corrected for being absent and forgetful, and the world passes them by, until in time they harden themselves against these softening impulses. Thus, because no voice speaks comfort to them when they need it, they grow to believe that there is none, and, as men, swell the numbers of the heartless and the hardened.

Fred's feet were carrying him from narrow streets to those that were narrower still. It was late, but still there were children crawling over the pavements and playing in the gutters, and men and women were passing to and fro. Though there were few lights in the windows now, as doors swung backwards and forwards they showed flaring gas and brightness within. First angry voices, then loud laughter, then noisy songs fell on Fred's ears as he passed along—sounds to which he was almost too accustomed to heed them. He stopped presently, however: from out a half-open door came the sound of a child's voice singing. Fred's first feeling was one of angry disgust—such words in tones so pure and sweet! The song ended, there was

a sound of clapping of hands and rough cries of "Go it again, Tommy." Some one passed out and left the door so that Fred could see within. A little boy in utter rags was standing up on the wooden counter, round which some dozen men and women were gathered with glasses in their hands. The boy did not want to repeat his performance; he looked round with frightened eyes, and made a movement to get down. A woman stepped up to him, and the look of fear deepened on the boy's face as she whispered something to him. She held up her glass to his lips, and the boy drank deeply, and then, nervous no longer, gave them a comic song with a drollery of manner and expression that made his hearers shake the house with their coarse laughter. Fred gave way to the feeling of amusement, and was still looking eagerly in at the door when a slap on his shoulder made him start.

"*You* here, Fraser. That youngster sings finely. Come on."

The new-comer was a tall lad with an ugly face and a low expression. Fred only knew him slightly, and he felt vexed that he should have been found so occupied by such a one.

"It's fine, ain't it? Just suits *you*, I should think."

The sneering tone and the meaning look made Fred's cheeks burn.

"It's simply disgusting," he said hotly.

"Not too loud, my dear. There, I won't say nothin'

about it. Be a gentleman all day, but after dark we wants a little fun, you know—a little music, and so on ; only we didn't mean to meet no friends. But he's done it now, so come and drink to the youngster."

The speaker thrust his arm through Fred's and drew him in, but the lad shook it hastily off.

"Leave me alone, Sam Bowler." Fred turned from the door, but Sam was after him. He knew only too well that for Fred to be in such a locality at such an hour, something unusual must have happened at home.

"Look 'ere, youngster," he said again, taking Fred's arm, "where is yer agoin' to? I seed yer run out o' yer 'ouse too sharp to be in a 'urry to go back there again. Come along, and I'll show yer where I 'angs out."

Sam's tone was sympathetic now. That he should understand his circumstances without being told was in a sort of way comforting to Fred. And, after all, where was he going to sleep? Yes, he would go for the sake of being with some one who had thought it worth while to trouble to think of him. Sam saw his advantage, and a look of cunning dawned in his eyes. He chatted incessantly all the way, becoming very confidential, and so inducing Fred to be the same; and he succeeded.

Fred became wild and reckless. He told why he had left his home; gave an account of his meeting with Mr. Carden on the bridge; and the lads laughed

heartily together over the idea that he should have thought it possible Fred might have meditated jumping into the river. Another of Sam's friends joined them, and still they strolled about, laughing and talking eagerly. But Fred was not happy; he was disgusted with himself, and so talked louder and faster to drown better thoughts. They passed again through the narrow street where he and Sam met half an hour ago, and again they stopped as they heard the child still singing. His voice was wavering and untrue now: he was half-stupified with all that had been given him to drink. Still there was a clamour for *one* more song, and the woman who had obliged him to begin again before chided him in angry tones. The boy was forced to obey; but either he was too drowsy to remember where he was, or so tired that only words it required no effort to repeat came to his lips, for instead of comic song, or popular ballad, he began the hymn,—

“There is a happy land,
Far, far away.”

He had almost finished the first verse before angry voices interrupted him—“None of that here, you young rascal”—“Shut up, will you?” From astonishment they had been silent for a minute: one man had crept away, thinking of his own little boy, who often sung that hymn to him. But Tommy would sing nothing else; and though they abused, even struck him, he would give them no other song.

Fred's companions had burst into loud laughter when they heard the words the boy was singing, and Sam had parodied them in lines that made Fred recoil from him. The child's words had gone straight to his heart. Only last Sunday golden-haired Willie had come in from school and sung that hymn in lisping tones to him. A sudden realization of his position came back to him. What was he doing? where was he going with these boys he knew to be bad? A moment of hurried thought, then he threw off Sam's arm.

"I can't come to-night; I must go," he said, and broke from him. A shower of abusive language followed him, and he heard Sam running behind him; but Fred eluded him, though he breathed freely only when he had again crossed the bridge and left the river between them.

Oh those words! how they rang in his ears, those pure tones in the midst of all that was vile, waking up his better self, calling him back again to think of what was true and right!

So the night closed in upon Fred, and the paths that had crossed one another in the evening had in a few short hours led through far different experiences.

Harry Carden had walked home through the streets of the same town, able in the midst of the same scenes to think true, healthy thoughts. He had gone to a home where he was safe from outside influences,

and found a real friend waiting for him there. Fred had walked down in his loneliness into the midst of the evil. He knew all about it; bad words and bad thoughts were familiar to him, all the surroundings suggested them, and his whole mind was tainted with the *knowledge of evil*. He too had found some one waiting for him there—a false friend ready to lead him wrong, a false sympathy encouraging him to speak of evil. Was it possible for one so young to do right in the midst of all that was so wrong? At present he did not wish it. At present he had only been startled into shame of the circumstances into which he had let himself be drawn. Fred still had no intention of going home, no wish to know what was right and to will to do it.

CHAPTER V.

"STEADY, BOYS, STEADY."

FRED'S waking the next morning was a strange one. As far back as he could remember, he had never passed a night in the open air before; and though it is true that something in the way of a roof was over his head, yet the holes were so many, and the spaces between the timbers so wide, that the morning sun found easy entrance and woke the lad with a start.

The river Fred had crossed by the bridge formed a sharp line of division between the town life of New Bransdale and the country life of Bransdale proper. He had left behind him the noise and bustle of the crowded town on the previous night, and passing by the straggling hamlet that claimed to be *the* Bransdale of ancient date, had found a night's lodging in an old cow-shed.

Fred sprang from his lowly resting-place and went out. How beautiful everything looked in the early sunshine! He appreciated it; he did more—he enjoyed it. It was so different from the usual hurried

scramble at home, the noise within and without, the eager watching of the clock, the rushing off at the last minute to be in time for work. Standing where he was, everything around him was silent and restful. It almost seemed as though there he must think some beautiful thought, that there should be something in him responding to influences such as these. But he did not, perhaps could not; and as his memory began to work, it brought back the sayings and doings of the previous night. He was inclined to blame himself for having put himself in a position where he could not go back without wounding his pride, and could not go on, for there was nothing definite before him. He felt gloomy and morose, though he did not want to. He would like to have enjoyed the glorious freshness around him, to have thrown off every anxiety, and have had a good day in the country. But alone though he was, his thoughts and his conscience would not let him rest. He turned resolutely away from the town, however, and began to climb the down that rose steeply half a mile from the river-bank. He walked quickly, and the exertion did him good. As he had to give his attention to gaining a footing on the short slippery grass, he became less engrossed in contemplating the future, and grew almost cheerful. The rays of the rising sun were making even the smoky cloud that hung over Bransdale look beautiful, and Fred stayed to look back again and again on the scene spread out behind him.

He turned, after a last and longest pause, to mount the yet remaining space, and as he did so he unconsciously began to whistle softly to himself, and then as he met the fresh wind that came blowing over the hill, he trilled out the familiar air more vigorously. As he prolonged note after note in hope perhaps of arousing an echo, his memory began to supply the words of the chorus of the well-known song:

" We always are ready ;
Steady, boys, stea—"

Fred suddenly stopped. There were but a few paces now between him and the summit of the hill, and from over the other side came something more than echo: the chorus of the same air was borne back to him in tones very little less musical than his own. His curiosity was excited, and a few quick steps brought him in sight of a lad climbing upwards from the opposite direction, and whistling as he went. He too must have discovered that he was not alone, for he was gazing around him with a wondering air, which hardly disappeared when Fred dawned on his horizon. It was no less a puzzle whence the voice came than why and how they both should have chosen the same tune.

Simple enough though the reason was, it was hardly likely that the boys would divine it. Twenty-four hours previously the same road had been traversed by an Italian with his barrel-organ on his back. As he had played over and over again his limited round

of tunes in the little village below, the same air had impressed itself on the one lad's memory that the other's quick ear had picked up as unconsciously from the same source as he threaded the busy, noisy streets of Bransdale.

They might have spoken, standing there almost face to face, with this odd coincidence to form a link between them; but they did not then, and, as though they had not seen each other, each turned a little to his right.

Fred had seen in the quick searching glance he had bestowed a boy perhaps about his own age, scarcely taller, but altogether stronger and larger. He noted his brown travel-stained clothes, saw the bundle he carried in his hand, and the stick that he seemed almost to need as a support for feet that were evidently weary, and he knew at once this lad was from the country. There was the unmistakable stamp of the villager about him, and it was partly because of this that Fred was silent. If he had looked a little more closely he would have seen beneath that unfashionable hat, pressed low upon the brow, a broad forehead, and large brown eyes that, when the wonder had died out of them, looked anxiously and longingly after his retreating figure. It was altogether a pleasant face, tanned now with much exposure to the air, and crowned with light hair that, curling close to his head, looked strangely fair against his dark complexion. Such was Jack

Carter when he first met the one with whom his life henceforward was so closely to entwine.

Jack, on his part, was less critical in his survey of Fred. The bright, sharp face, the slight form, the easy, careless step attracted him. What was there in it all that made him at once feel the difference between this lad and himself? What made him look down discontentedly on his countrified clothes and large ungainly boots? Jack recognized something he longed to possess in this stranger lad, and a look of discontent gathered round his lips as he watched him. He felt that Fred had taken him in in the one searching glance he had bestowed; and when he saw him turn away, already weary and dispirited, his heart sank within him.

But Fred suddenly stopped, and turning back a few steps shouted to the stranger to know how far it was to Ringdown. Jack had thrown himself down on the grass, but at Fred's words sprang up again.

"It's a long, long way," he said. "I've been near four days walking it."

Fred's feet were bearing him towards Jack now; there was a ring of something in the tone in which the answer was given that made him want to ask more.

"You know it?" he said almost enviously. "You come from there, from Ringdown?"

Know it—every stone, every tree of it was dear to him; and he concentrated all the feelings Fred's

question roused into a "Yes" so vehement that the lad stared at him in surprise. But Jack's eyes were looking far away; they had turned from the town upon which he had hitherto bent them so persistently, and at Fred's first words had followed his, and seemed as though they too would search out that distant village—the village that held his home. Jack had resolutely kept his thoughts from travelling back across those downs; but now they went in spite of himself, and almost enviously he asked of Fred if he were going there.

"May be," was the abrupt reply.

"You've no friends there?" Jack questioned again, and he did not understand Fred's half-mocking echo of the word "Friends!" only it silenced him.

"Is there work there?" was Fred's next question; and Jack half smiled as he looked at the slight, almost fragile form.

"Not for the likes of you; there's little enough for any one; that's why I've comed away."

The ice between the boys was broken, and as question and answer followed one another, and each caught glimpses into the past life of the other, interest soon quickened into liking, and the foundation of their future friendship was laid. Fred soon found out that Jack had done what he had often meditated doing, and had left his home to make his own way in the world. But the country lad was

breaking his heart for all he had left behind; whereas, if Fred had gone, his thoughts would seldom have turned homewards with anything approaching affectionate regret.

All through the spring and summer months Jack Carter's father, the village blacksmith of Ringdown, had been slowly dying; and three weeks ago he had died, leaving a wife and three children—a girl of eight, a baby boy of four, and Jack, his eldest. The forge had long been silent, for the invalid could not bear the constant noise of the workmen working there, and Jack, who for several years had been under his father, was thrown out of employment. Before long, another smith and another forge were established in the village, and those who had been jealous of the man who had hitherto occupied the place they coveted were not disposed to take his son into their employ. Now and again Jack would get a day's work with one and another, but in spite of all his efforts could find no regular place. He felt it keenly; and when his father died, and it became his duty to try to support his mother, he redoubled his efforts, with still less success. Now and again remarks that the neighbours had dropped would reach him, and he was stung with their injustice towards him. "A great lazy fellow," "A drag on the little his mother has," were among the thoughtless words that reached him; and the lad brooded over them. Was it true? Would his mother be better off were he away?

Must the dream he had always had of being one day in his father's place be put aside?

A fortnight passed, and yet he hesitated, till one day, as he washed his hands in the back-kitchen, he heard his mother and a friend talking, and the words they spoke came distinctly to him. They were speaking of him; and he heard his mother acknowledge that when the forge should be sold, without him she would have enough, with the washing she took in, to support herself and her two younger children.

"He ate so much, his clothes wore out so fast, it was impossible that at present he could earn enough entirely to support himself. He didn't seem to take an interest in any other than blacksmith's work. He was such a big fellow to have loitering about idle at home." Sentence after sentence reached him. Mrs. Black suggested, and Mrs. Carter assented.

All that day Jack had been from farm to farm offering to do anything, but getting promises of nothing more than odd jobs. And his motive had been to help his mother; and now after all he could better help her by going away: so he would go. He never said a word when he went in to tea, and the evening passed as usual. Mrs. Carter had been an excellent wife, and was a careful mother. She trained her children well, and kept them neat and tidy; she had nursed her husband devotedly, and was prepared, now that she had lost him, to work hard for her children. But there was never any display of affec-

tion. Even rosy-cheeked, round-faced Robbie seldom climbed up into her lap or stroked her cheeks with his chubby hands. He was well fed and well cared for, and so was Sally, and it never struck their mother that they could lack anything; and yet in their hearts there was a natural longing to cling to some one that, now their father was dead, seemed to meet with no return. Sally had been his special pet, Robbie had always clung to Jack, and Jack himself had been his father's constant companion. So when Jack began to think of going away, it never entered his mind that such a step on his part could cause his mother grief. Robbie, he knew, would cry for him; and so for the next two days he was more constantly than ever with the child. He did not tell his mother of his intention, for fear she should prevent him, but quietly made his own plans. Late one night he carried out the few things he should take with him, and carefully packing them in a red handkerchief, left them hidden behind a haystack, and then turned back to sleep for the last time beneath the roof where he had been born.

The lad's heart was aching with the thought of leaving the village. He loved every bit of it; all was his home. The lads about were life-long friends, and in many a game and sport he was their leader. But he had promised his father to take care of his mother, and the best way he could do it was to go. Like a thoughtless boy, he left no message or note behind

him. He seemed to think that when he was gone his mother must divine the reason, and that her only feeling would be one of relief. So, early the following morning he set out as usual, as if to look for work.

"Good-bye, mother," he called out as he left the door; and as she watched him down the path, she thought what a fine strong fellow he looked.

Robbie followed him. "Me want to see the 'parks," he lisped, thrusting his hand into his brother's.

"There are no sparks to-day, Rob," Jack answered; but nevertheless he turned aside and pushed the forge door open. How cold and chill it looked! Everything was still in disorder as the workmen had left it, but cobwebs were beginning to twine round the tools that once were daily handled, and signs of rust were creeping where they never had been seen before. Jack had looked to have been the one to rekindle that fire, and make all again as it used to be, and the hopeless prospect before him made him almost break down. Robbie was running about, touching one thing and lifting another; but the dreariness of the place seemed to damp even his bright spirits, and he came back with a doleful face to say there "wasn't any 'parks at all."

Jack lifted him up. "Say good-bye to Jack, Robbie;" and the child obediently squeezed his face between his chubby arms. Then, as though he must tell some one, Jack added, "Say a great good-bye, Robbie; Jack is not coming back any more."

The child did not understand, but he repeated the squeezing operation, and then ran in-doors, and was very quiet playing on the floor for a quarter of an hour or so, when, as though his brother's words had lingered in his mind, he said suddenly,—

"Jack's not coming back *any* more."

"What?" said Mrs. Carter, sharply lifting her hands out of the washing-tub. The child looked up at her and smiled saucily, but he would not repeat the words. So Jack went away; and not till four days had left many miles between him and his village home, heartsore, footsore, and hopeless, did he meet Fred Fraser on Bransdale Down.

Could Jack have seen inside his home that afternoon, he would not have believed that his mother's stern face was pale from weeping and watching for him. Like so many, she loved her children, but without cultivating any sympathy between them and herself. They came in and out, and never felt they *wanted* to tell her what they had been doing in their absence.

"I never thought but what he had all he wanted," she said, when Mr. Davis their clergyman came down and pointed out this bond of sympathy that was missing in their home life. But she took his words to heart; and Sally and Robbie began unconsciously to yield to the more gentle, tender manner which she showed towards them, and gave her their confidence.

"I never thought," was Mrs. Black's excuse when

Mrs. Carter went to her and told her how she had heard from Jack's friends that her words had finally brought this about.

"I did not think such a thing possible," Jack's Sunday-school teacher replied when Mr. Davis went and told her of the disappearance of her brightest, most intelligent pupil; and from that day she tried to be a better friend to her boys, and to let them feel they might bring their bad thoughts and perplexities fearlessly to her, and she would help them through.

And then the good man went home and took himself to task, and turned it all over in his mind to find where he had failed in his duty to the village lads, and how it was that this one he had known from his childhood, and had cared for more than many, had strayed from his fold.

So Jack's going cast a sorrow over some hearts in Ringdown; and then the village settled down, and the slow monotonous life went on, and few were long conscious of the loss of the influence of a bright, true-hearted boy from amongst them.

CHAPTER VI.

JACK.

UCH was the home, and such some of the influences, from which Jack Carter had come; and as he climbed Bransdale Down he was as ignorant of the life that awaited him in Bransdale as he was of the lad even then drawing near him, ready to be his friend.

As the boys offered a strong contrast in appearance, so they did in character.

Had Jack never left his native village he would have grown up there slow in speech and thought as those that surrounded him. The eagerness of boyhood that now prompted him to seize every opportunity for increasing his knowledge would have died of starvation, and Jack would have risen to no higher level than that of those around him. He possessed what Fred did not—a desire to learn about everything, and a perseverance that enabled him in some degree to satisfy this desire. Everything in him was growing, and his mind was feeling about for something fresh to make its own. Had any one

known the lad well enough to read this, they might have satisfied his longings and helped to train and mould his character. But no one thought as they saw him about that anything was lacking in his life; the village lads stood altogether in their minds, and no one believed that there were times when these young scamps got dissatisfied with themselves and everything around them, and *did* look round to see if there was any one near to help them. Jack was fond of reading. He *would* read, and because no one thought to lend him books, he saved up his pennies and spent them in weekly and monthly papers. He had to walk many miles to the nearest market-town to purchase these; but he never grudged the time thus spent, and always had something in his pocket to while away spare minutes in the day. He had often envied those who lived within easy reach of cheap literature, and as he turned towards Bransdale this was one of the things that attracted him to life in a town. But all bright hopes had died away when, homeless and friendless, Fred's whistle broke upon his ear on Bransdale Down.

Fred did not betray his position to this lad he had met, but it seemed as though the whole current of his thoughts changed as he talked with him. He had never spoken to a boy like this before—a boy who loved his home and all connected with it so earnestly; who had left it all as an act of duty to his mother; who spoke of right and wrong as something with

which he had to do. The words and the deeds of those with whom he had been last night came back to Fred, and he contrasted them with the honest simplicity of this country lad. He amused Fred by a strange mixture of knowledge and ignorance of life outside his native village—knowledge that he had picked up from the books he had read, and an ignorance resulting from life-long seclusion in an isolated hamlet. Fred had not the heart to tell him untrue tales, as he had so often done to other adventurers in his town.

The simple earnestness of Jack puzzled as it attracted him, and he began to think what town life would do for him—how soon it would tarnish and spoil it all. But other thoughts were rising in him too, loud thoughts accusing him of failure in every right feeling that prompted this stranger. Here was he running away from every duty, leaving every responsibility, neglecting every home call. He began to hope Jack would never know how cowardly he had been—began to think he would go home again. Harry Carden's words, little Willie's voice as recalled by the singing child, came back to him; and rising from the grass, he set his face homewards, and his new friend, Jack Carter, followed him downwards into the valley.

The morning hours had been rolling over their heads while they had been learning to know each other on the summit of the hill, and they lingered so

long in the village below that again it was eventide before they crossed the bridge.

There was no excuse now for Fred to remain with Jack, yet he slackened his pace more and more as they passed the end of the bridge.

"Where are you going? Fred asked. "Where shall you sleep?"

Jack's face was flushed with excitement at this first entrance into a life that was unknown to him. All that was so familiar to Fred was new and interesting to him; so he only replied he was going to look round. No thought of danger or of difficulty crossed his mind, even all he had left behind was for the minute forgotten; he was anxious to get to know about all those things that were strange to him, curious to feel at home amongst them.

So they parted, Fred to go forward to face known difficulties, Jack to tread an unknown path beset with dangers of which he was ignorant.

Eyes had watched that parting, however. As the boys exchanged their last words, unseen by them Sam Bowler stood near them. He was still angry that Fred had escaped him, and determined to pay him out in some way: surely here was the chance put into his hands. He stood and watched Jack, and soon read his tale in his movements. From the country—from home—nothing to do—nowhere to go, he commented as he followed him. Sam had known other young fellows come to Bransdale like that, and he knew

how to manage them. He saw Jack wander on, looking at everything with a wondering curiosity, and he let him wander till he began to feel lost and bewildered in the crowd that surrounded him. Then was Sam's opportunity. He managed to meet him sharply as he came round a corner, stumbled against him, and as though that was introduction enough, asked his pardon and walked beside him.

"I seed yer come over the bridge with young Fraser," he began; "fine young chap that; we're chums, he and me."

Jack was not quick, but this remark rather surprised him. He would not have thought this low-browed, repulsive-looking lad would have been a chosen friend of the one who had won his liking that day. But when he had talked a little he forgot he was ugly and coarse; it was so pleasant to hear all about everything; and yet Jack did not tell out to this boy, as he had done to Fred, all about his home and his father, why he was there, and what he hoped to do. He did not trust him; he half wished he would go; and yet it was pleasant just when he was beginning to get lonely to have one so friendly draw near him.

"Specs' young Fraser told yer where to sleep?" Sam presently remarked, and expressed great surprise at Jack's negative.

"Ah, well, yer'd like to see him again, I guess. We don't make no 'pointments, but there's a place we was at last night; it's as likely as not we might find him again."

It was only because Sam was quite sure they were *not* likely to meet him that he suggested it. Jack followed with willing feet. He had a sort of impression that Fred would save him from this self-imposed companion, and would clear a way for him through present difficulties.

Jack began to get alarmed as the streets grew narrower and darker. He had never seen houses so close to one another, roads so narrow, or pavements so dirty as those they were treading. Sam seemed to take it all so as a matter of course, however, Jack could not show he was afraid, and he was ashamed of a sudden feeling that came over him that he must cry or do something foolish. Now and again Sam met a friend to whom he nodded familiarly, and Jack began to have an impression those nods were more than mere recognitions.

"Seen Fred Fraser to-night?" The question was addressed to a boy leaning outside a small public-house and music-hall. "Special chum of 'is this 'un; we's been a 'unting for 'im everywhere. Send 'im in arter us if you sees 'im awaitin'." Sam pushed the door and went in, and Jack, yet more surprised to think so low a haunt was a likely meeting-place with Fred, followed.

Sam handed the lad a glass of something to drink as though it were a matter of course, and Jack, afraid to offend him, took it.

So began the country lad's first night in Bransdale.

One by one Sam's friends gathered round him; and talking loud and fast, the centre of the group, Jack hardly knew himself. They made a kind of hero of him. It was the old tale over again: the boy was flattered and applauded till all his money was spent for their benefit, and yet all the while they made him feel as though it was he who was indebted to them.

Was there no one to open his eyes to the hedge of evil being planted around his path? Was this lad, who with a half heroic sense of duty had come to that town, to be hopelessly lost in those busy streets? No; help was coming from the quarter where it least would have been expected. Though Sam was the leader in this group, though it was his voice that drew in most brilliant colours the happy, easy life Jack might live amongst them, there was all the while struggling up in his heart a kind of shame to which he long had been a stranger. He might have looked round on those sharp, vicious young faces before him and remembered how in almost every instance his had been the first strong influence for evil in their lives, and in their willingness to lead the stranger downwards he might have read his success. But Sam had no power to think thoughts such as these; only as he watched and listened to Jack he felt almost sick of the work he was at. All that time, in the midst of those surroundings, no coarse or impure word had crossed Jack's lips, and now and again he would use an expression that made the boys pause

for a minute and look at him wonderingly. Sam noticed all this, and even as Fred had done, he began to like this lad; he evidently had different thoughts to any that ever came to him, and he almost felt it a pity that he should be spoiled. It was from yielding to these feelings that Sam dispersed his associates earlier than usual and took Jack off by himself; but out in the night air he found their work of ruin had been begun only too surely, and he had to steady Jack with his strong arm as he led him towards a lodging-house. He took him up to a long, low room where some three or four boys already were sleeping, and empty cots told of more to follow. Jack fell into a heavy sleep at once, and Sam turned to open and look over the contents of his bundle. One by one he took up the things and handled them half reverently. They told of home, and thought; and Sam had no home, and no one ever thought of him. Last of all he came to Jack's Bible, wrapped up in an old woollen comforter. Sam touched it, looked from it to the sleeping lad—a boy who cared to put a Bible in his bundle. Sam Bowler had never known such a one before. He opened it half curiously, and turned to the title-page. It was seldom he had occasion to read writing, and it was only slowly he managed to spell out the words,

JOHN CARTER.

From his friend the Rev. Evelyn Davis.

"The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him."

Sam sat and stared at that page by the flickering light of the farthing dip that was fast expiring. Many, many years had passed since he had held a Bible in his hands. He turned over the pages gently with his clumsy, blackened fingers, starting at every sound, lest some one should come and find him so occupied. Did this country boy care for this little book, that he had brought it with him? Did those words about some one who was good mean anything to him? Anyway it meant one thing: he had a friend somewhere; and he, Sam Bowler, was alone, and the world held no friend for him. He wrapped the book up and put it away again, and then stood thinking by Jack's side. He knew when the morning came he would feel differently again—he would be going his own bad ways, and taking this boy with him. He could not trust himself not to; and yet he did not wish to be the one to lead Jack wrong, so he left him alone and stole down the stairs again.

"I won't sleep 'ere to-night," he said to the woman who came out to see who was astir; "there's the money for the young 'un upstairs;" and Sam went out into the darkness a better boy than he had been for many weeks and months.

CHAPTER VII.

FRED GOES HOME.



WHEN Fred left Jack, he turned straight down the street he had trodden so hastily the day before, determined to get home before his resolve should have weakened. Thoughts were crowding through his brain: his was a quick, sensitive temperament, and to go through all that he knew awaited him would be little short of real pain to him. How Annie would taunt him with his strength of purpose, and Emma bring up again and again the hasty words he had uttered! On he went, however: it was right; and just now, though he hardly knew why, he wanted to do what was right. Fred walked down the street, and remarks he heard showed that his flight had been the gossip of the day. Their house was the first one round the corner. He turned sharply, and came upon an open door, and standing on the step, with arms that were stretched out at once in a glad welcome, was the one thing that as yet Fred loved in all the world, his little cousin Willie. A scream of pleasure came from his smiling lips, and

in a minute he was in Fred's arms. All the dreariness and bitterness passed out of the lad's life, and he felt as though he had indeed come home. Willie meanwhile did not much appreciate this display of affection, and he struggled down and demanded a regular game.

The sound of his voice brought Annie out of a room, but with Willie in his arms Fred hardly heeded her bitter words. He played with the child till it was late, and then took him back to his home—a home poorer and sadder even than Fred's; but the boy was too young to know it, and he bounded in with cheeks aglow and eyes bright with delight, announcing to his mother and sisters that "Fwed had tum home, and wasn't doin' to be a bad boy and wun away any more."

Fred lingered to talk with his aunt, with whom he was a favourite, and then went home, willingly deferring the hour until as late as possible.

He saw a light still burning in the sitting-room as he neared the house, and thinking he would creep in unheard and steal away to the attic where he slept, Fred opened the street door and entered. As he closed it, however, he stood silent and terror-stricken. A sound reached his ears that he had never heard before, and he drew near to the room from which it proceeded. He opened it noiselessly and looked in. It was empty but for one man who sat motionless at the table, from which the supper things had not

yet been removed. The man's head was bent down on his hands, and the noise that Fred had heard was the sound of his father sobbing. The lad was awestruck; he hardly knew that men could weep, and tears such as these were beyond his power to understand. They came from a worn-down, over-burdened spirit, and were provoked by a feeling of remorse; and though Fred had his own troubles, he knew little of emotions such as these. A sudden feeling of penitence swept over him. When his father had tried to calm the storm between him and his mother, he had hurled back disrespectful words. Had these helped to bring this wave of sorrow and to break down this strong man? Fred drew near and laid a hesitating hand upon his father's arm.

A tremor ran through the motionless form, and the man raised his head.

"I thought you had gone this time, lad."

His tone surprised his son even more than his words, there was something so kind and so fatherly in it.

"I thought you had left me to make the best of it alone, and I can't see how to steer clear through it all. The money's paid out quicker than I can bring it in, and everything here goes crookedly."

The walls seemed to echo back into the boy's ears the bitter abuse that had been thrown at his father; and a better wish than the passionate one to be a

burden to him no longer, took possession of him, and prompted him to say earnestly,—

“Father, what can I do?” and then in subdued tones, “I’m sorry, but when mother goes on like that—”

“Hush, Fred, I know it is hard for you, but try not to quarrel with the girls when she is here.”

“Where is she now?” Fred asked the question hastily, bitterly, and the man put one hand on his boy’s shoulder as he rose, and answered as though the words had only won their calmness through a hard battle, “I do not know;” and he went out, closing the door, so that Fred understood he was not to follow.

While he had been out with Willie that evening Harry Carden had called at the house. He had come to find Fraser alone in it, boiling the water to make his own tea. He had come in to him holding out his hand, and saying, “You are in trouble over your son; can I help you?” And Fraser had been won by his hearty, sympathetic manner. Philip was with him, but he had lingered outside; and though, as Fraser had watched them coming down the street, he had wondered what they did there, and almost bitterly remembered the day when he could dress as they did, he did not resent Harry’s sympathy. It was something new and fresh and strong.

“He will come back I feel sure,” Harry had said,

and the father had negatived it, not knowing that already his son had crossed the threshold. Harry talked on till the man began to feel the old pride he had had in his boy's abilities returning and a new desire to help him forward again. Harry meanwhile was reading the family history in all around, and in the man's avoidance of any allusion to his wife; and before he rose he said,—

“You have still a greater trouble than I have heard of; can I help you in that too?”

Fraser looked across at him. It was because of this very thing his friends had dropped him, low associates claimed him, his children neglected him. No one had ever said “help” before. But no; that pride that had made him so long show a hard front to the world must be maintained. Every one might know, but no one must mention Mrs. Fraser's unsteady habits. He turned silent and morose immediately; and feeling he could do no more, Harry rose, but again he held out his hand, and he said,—

“Though I may not help you, I shall pray for you, and God will help you to *help her*.”

He emphasized the last words, and they burnt into the man's brain. “Help her! help her!” over and over again rang the words. It was what he had never done. Sometimes he had screened her, sometimes he had blamed her, but he had lately hardened himself against her, and had never bent to help her.

The girls came in, and never mentioning Fred, they

left him again and went to their room ; and then all Harry had said came back to him. He craved the sympathy he had refused, and thus it was that Fred had found the strong man broken down, and had seen in his father a softness and a gentleness he had never known before. Left alone, Fred sat over the fire, and there he fell asleep, only to be awakened a few hours later by hasty footsteps and noisy voices. It was his mother and father entering the room together ; and rousing himself suddenly, the lad fled away to his attic, there to continue his interrupted slumbers, trying to forget what the waking would bring him.

So the night closed down on these boys, ending for a time their vague longings for the power to do right, their feelings of loneliness in that busy town, and stilling all anxious broodings over the future.

CHAPTER VIII.

THREE WAKINGS.



O each of these three boys, at whose lives we have glanced, the waking on this Thursday morning was like an entrance into a fresh era—like turning a leaf, into a new chapter of experiences.

Fred woke unusually early, and could not sleep again. He felt restless and uneasy. The scene with his father the previous evening, Jack's entrance into his life, all the sarcasm and jeering he might expect on his reappearance—thoughts of all this rushed at once into his mind, and he rose and dressed himself. He threw open the window, but the sun was even then beginning to get hot. There was a glare in the dusty street, carts and people were moving up and down, and it was full of life and motion. He turned away and looked round the small attic that had so long been his, once his alone; now his brother Tim claimed a corner, and was sound asleep, in spite of all the noises round him. Fred had an affection for this little room. He liked to save old

prints from the illustrated papers, and to pin them on the sloping walls. Now and again he had even bought a picture, and spare moments were often given to roughly carving frames for those that were favourites. There were his bat and cricket stumps in one corner, and, hanging against the only piece of straight wall, a shelf he had put up, which held some half-carved ships of ancient date, the only books that he possessed, and, dearest of all his treasures, an old pistol.

Fred's eyes wandered over these with a satisfied look, and then rested at last on an illuminated text. It had been given him long, long ago, by an aunt who knew him in those happier days, dim memories of which still haunted him. She had taken him down to see the sea, and ever after the boy had so admired this painted text that she had taken it from her wall and given it to him. Fred must have *seen* it every time he looked around his small domain; but it seemed to him so long since he had *noticed* it, that the words in black and gilt, now faded to a dingy brown, had almost passed from his mind. He went across the room, and looked at what still, for memory's sake, was beautiful in his eyes. It was a long card with a picture at each end: one of dark, surging waves, and a storm-tossed boat—all told of danger and despair; and those within seemed struggling on without a ray of light to guide them. Opposite was another picture: all there was calm and still; the

water was sparkling in the first rays of the rising sun, and the purple mist on the distant hills was rolling back, showing homes and villages that were sheltered there. It was roughly done, in strong colours; but the ideas were there, and Fred looked at it with pleasure. Then he read over the words; they were taken from St. Mark iv.: "Master, carest thou not that we perish? And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, PEACE, BE STILL. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm."

The hopelessness of the faithless disciples' cry seemed to find an echo in Fred's heart. He had no one to speak to, no friend near him to whom to appeal; but to the whole world at large he seemed crying out in an indefinite way, "Carest thou not that I perish?—that I have hopes, and fears, and wishes, and powers, and they are all withering away? Is there no one who can stop in his busy life for a minute to think and care?" He looked again at the peaceful side of the scene—perhaps thought for a minute, in a dim, indistinct way, of the One who had brought calm into the storm; and then, half ashamed of having done so, put it aside, and went downstairs and lighted the kitchen fire. He did it with a sense of satisfaction in doing what he did not like, and prepared to show a stony front to the family when they appeared. No one should know that he felt or that he cared for anything. So he stood almost silent under all the questions and reproaches thrown

at him ; and then went off again to look for work, and, though he was too proud to acknowledge it, to look for Jack.

Jack's morning, meanwhile, had begun in different and in more difficult circumstances. He had been awoke by rough voices, and had struggled back to consciousness with an aching head and a heavy heart. He did not know where he was, or how he was there ; the strange lads hurrying out of the room were cross and unsociable. There was not one face among them that he knew. Slowly, hazily, all the doings of yesterday came back, and with them a sudden fear that Sam's figure would rise unexpectedly from some corner, and that he would be held again, as he had been last night, by an influence stronger than his own. The fear stirred him to immediate action. He rose and seized his bundle ; he saw it had all been turned over, but he knew he had no money, and so it hardly mattered. Then he stood for a minute irresolute. Jack had been well brought up ; he had been taught what Sam knew nothing of, and Fred knew little. He had been taught to pray. In his country home he had never begun a day without a prayer by his own bedside ; and here he felt he could not go out and begin the day without it. He looked round the empty room and towards the door, then dropped for a few minutes on his knees. But as he knelt, a sudden sense of the evil he had done and the evil he had seen the previous night swept over him, and

changed Jack's usual prayer into a cry for help to do right in the midst of so much wrong.

Then he went out into this new strange world with something to help him that the others had not got. His one wish was to get away from the friends he had made the previous night, and from the possibility of seeing Sam again. It was early yet, and with an eager desire to escape he set his face towards where he thought the river was, and threaded his way through street after street, until he saw the tall chimneys of the mills upon the bank, and stood by the side of the darkly flowing stream. He followed it until he reached the bridge; and standing there, his courage suddenly gave way, his hopes all seemed to vanish, and in his hunger and weariness the lad half sobbed. Everything behind seemed doubly dear—his mother, his home, his little brother. A great longing to see them again possessed him. Everything around him looked doubly difficult, and the sort of life to which he was accustomed seemed impossible in this town. Suddenly the sound of a footstep on the gravel path below reached him, and he looked down to see the tall form of a blacksmith passing quickly by. He was wearing his smith's apron, and the sight of it attracted Jack. A longing to get back to his old occupation seized him, and he caught up his bundle and rapidly followed him. He saw him turn down into narrow streets, and stop at last before a broken-looking wooden door, which he

unlocked and entered. Jack lingered outside, and watched him settle to his work. Every now and then the smith looked restlessly towards the door, as though expecting some one. He moved towards the bellows, and, laying his hand on them, soon kindled a blaze. But one could not do the work of two, and as he turned to hold the iron, he was forced to leave the bellows. No word passed his lips, but Jack saw his face get dark and angry; and after the next failure, without more hesitation the lad pushed the door, and saying, "Shall I do it?" worked the handle diligently until the bar was red-hot. He was ready then to hold and turn the heated metal while the smith struck it, and approved himself to him as no novice in the art. The door had been pushed again while they were busy, and a little girl stood waiting to say that her father was ill and could not come. She delivered her message and went, and Jack worked on, his companion appearing too busy to speak any word except concerning the job in hand. When they stopped for breakfast, Jack summoned up courage to ask the smith to employ him; and the man, who though silent had observed him closely, gave permission to him to remain that day, and to come again till the sick workman should be well. He was won, not only by the lad's real ability, but also by his pleasant, honest face, and that strange gentleness of manner which had struck both Fred and Sam the day before.

And as for Sam, had he woke up to anything new this day? Motherless, fatherless, out in the streets, could any good influence touch him there? Yes, something had touched him. Over his sharp, unlovely face there passed now and then a softer expression, as though, amidst the dark crowd of thoughts that flowed for ever through his brain, some passing idea of something true, of something lovely, had shed a fleeting ray of light. For the first time for a long while right battled with the wrong in the lad's heart, and a wish half rose that he was not so bad. Then, to rid himself of the misery of this struggling into life of conscience, his deeds that day were more daring, his plans more bold. Yet, as he roved the streets, Sam was looking for something—looking, with a sort of hunger that made him ashamed, for the bright sweet face of Jack.

CHAPTER IX.

WILLIE.

“ARRY, what should you do if you were me?”

It was the tenth time Philip had asked the question of his friend, and yet no answer had satisfied him.

“I should learn grammar.”

It was Ruth Carden, Harry's youngest sister, who answered. They were seated in the pleasant drawing-room at The Elms, the home of their married sister Emily.

A week had passed since Philip's unexpected appearance, and still he lingered, partly because it was so pleasant to be with those he had not seen for so long, and partly because he wanted this knotty question settled before he went back to London.

“What should you do, Harry,” he repeated, “granting my education might be more complete, as Ruth suggests?”

He was walking about the room restlessly.

“Harry will say, ‘Do right;’ it is the only answer

he ever has for such questions," Ruth answered again.

"And what is right?"

"He will say you are the only one that can know, and so escape all further trouble."

"Right is generally disagreeable, is it not, Ruth?"

Standing near the window was a boy of seven years old, reading intently from a book he was holding in his hands, yet listening nevertheless to what his elders were saying; and he flung it down at Philip's words, looking up at him with a sunny smile.

"Uncle Philip"—the children had always given him this title—"you are just like Dolly when she is naughty. She tells mother she does not like what is right, and does not want to do it."

"Am I, Frank? and what does mother say?"

"She says it pleases father."

"And then does Dolly do it?"

"Not always; not till she is quite good, then she does."

"Then 'right' is pleasing father, is it, Frankie?" Philip said, looking down into the earnest little face turned up to him.

"Oh! not only father—mother, and nurse, auntie, and everybody, I suppose."

"Then it is pleasing everybody, is it?" Philip went on for the sake of teasing him; "and if Hugh wants you to go into the orchard, and you go to please him, it is right, though father says you are not to."

"Philip, what a shame!" Ruth interposed; "how can you puzzle him so?" But Frank had seen the difficulty, and was ready with a reply.

"Uncle Philip, we are only little boys, Hugh and I, and can't know, but there must always be a real right somewhere."

"And we have got to find it out the best way we can, I suppose, generally by mistakes."

There was a ring of something in his voice that touched the child's sensitive heart.

"Uncle Philip, what are you sorry about?" he asked, and there was something in his tone and face that made the young man suddenly bend down and take the two little brown hands in his.

"Because I cannot find out the 'real right,' Frankie, and there is no one to tell me what to do—no one knows."

"Mother can always tell us," the boy answered, striving his utmost to think of how to comfort one he loved so dearly.

"I have no mother, Frankie."

The gentle awe-stricken "Haven't you?" was almost too much for Philip; and then with the sudden thought he added, "God tells mother; so perhaps, Uncle Philip, if you really want to know—" He had turned his head as he spoke, and catching sight of Hugh through the trees, broke off, "Let me go, please; we are going to catch hedgehogs."

Philip released the little hands, and the silence

that had dropped over the three was unbroken whilst they watched the little figures flitting to and fro in the twilight.

They were interrupted at last by Roslyn, Harry's Newfoundland, and Philip's gift, bounding in at the open window.

"He has come to tell us to go," Harry said, and the friends were soon pacing to and fro by the river, whilst Roslyn disported himself in the water. All through the summer months his master granted him this indulgence, and he enjoyed himself to the utmost while the friends walked in silence. Philip was fighting no easy battle. All his life he had hated trouble and anything curtailing his freedom. He had hitherto settled to no occupation; and though he knew it was his father's dearest wish that he should be associated with him in his business, and prepare himself to succeed him, he had turned a deaf ear to the voice of duty. Since his absence in America, the circumstances had presented themselves in two different aspects. He saw, first, a neglected duty; he saw his father toiling all alone, toiling for him; and all his better feelings prompted him to return and take at once the place he had so long left vacant. Then, secondly, he had become more certainly and consciously aware of his own failing health. He knew, and the doctors had not hidden it from him, that disease was sapping his life. He knew he might not look forward to long years of activity or any period

of certain good health; and this knowledge made office work look useless and arduous. It seemed needless to give what strength and energy were left him to preparing for a post he never would fill. This unsettled state of feeling had made him restless, and often unnaturally variable, since he had been at Bransdale. But that night he had felt he must decide, and above the conflicting thoughts little Frank's words were still ringing.

"Harry," he said at last, suddenly breaking the silence, "I think I have done with all the thinking now. I have bothered about all the whys and wherefores till my powers of balancing one against the other are exhausted. Other things *may* be right, but I have to hunt about for reasons to make them look so. One thing *must* be, and there is no doubt about it. I shall go home to-morrow and tell father I am ready for work."

"To-morrow—so soon?"

"Yes; Frank said there was a real right somewhere, and this further delay must be wrong. I know it; I have known it all along. Father wants me, and while he is alive I will go and try to be to him a little what mother was to us. It was good of you to go and see him so often when I was away. But he has a weakness for this good-for-nothing son of his. I did not know how glad he would be to see me; he nearly cried from pleasure, I think." Then, with a ring of the old boyish impatience in his voice, he

added, "I shall want your help. You know all. So understand if you can."

"You have it, Philip; and I am glad of this. I have seen the blank in Mr. Langton's life, only—"

"I know all the 'onlys,' so leave it. Perhaps in a few years I shall want you to show me what that most miserable of creatures, an invalid young man, can do with his fragment of life. You have shown me the way into all the difficult things of life as yet. I have not said anything this time, but your patience with my restless changeableness, and never giving advice, has brought this about; and remember this, Harry, if this or anything else I may do in a small way should prove worth doing, it will be because you—"

A piercing shriek rang through the air—a child's voice, shrill with fear and despair. Both young men paused, listened for half a second, and then turned in the direction from which it came. Philip was the swifter of the two. He sprang over the low palings that bordered the river-walk, sped over a space of broken ground, and in a few minutes stood upon the bank of a stream that was running deep and strong to join the river. It needed but one glance to see in the centre of that stream a figure battling with the waters, striving to raise something with one arm and to gain the shore with the other—striving, as Philip saw, in vain. In a moment, before Harry had even come up to him, he had flung off his coat and dashed

in to rescue the drowning ones. A few bold strokes, and he had almost gained them, when something passed him, something black and shaggy, and laid hold of whatever it was that the other was holding, and turned towards the bank. The boy—for now Philip could see that he was no more—freed from his burden, turned to follow; but his strength was exhausted, and it was only with Philip's aid that he regained the bank. Roslyn had already laid his burden at his master's feet, and Harry was bending over a beautiful boy with golden hair as Philip and Fred (for it was he) came out of the water.

The boy, heedless of who his rescuers were, sprang eagerly to the child's side.

"Willie! Willie!" he cried, but there was no movement; "he is not dead, he can't be!" he exclaimed vehemently. "I must take him home." He raised him in his arms, and pushing his way through the crowd of curious boys and children who had gathered round them, sped away. He did not see amongst that crowd one who watched him with eager, sympathetic eyes, and who followed him as he turned away.

Harry had risen from his knees and looked round to see if Philip would come with him to the child's home. In a moment he was by his friend's side. Philip was leaning against a tree, deadly pale, and hardly able to keep from falling. Harry threw his coat around him, and tried to help him to move. Philip smiled a weak, helpless smile, and leaning

heavily, moved a few steps, and Harry saw it was useless to hope to get him home without assistance. Just then a lad came running along the path, curious to see what was causing a crowd in that usually unfrequented spot. He was a lad with a low, retreating forehead, and an ugly face; but Harry beckoned him, for he was taller and stronger than the little urchins gazing at them. At his bidding he supported Philip on the other side, and together they almost carried him to the road. Then Sam fetched a cab and helped him in with a gentleness that struck Harry, and as the lad looked round for approval, he held out his hand to give him sixpence. For the first time in his life Sam refused a silver coin. He shook his head, and closing the cab door would have drawn hastily away. There was only a moment, while the driver mounted to his seat, but in that moment Harry held out his hand and shook the lad's, saying, "Thank you; you have been a good friend to us." So another influence for good passed into the rough lad's life, so small, so trifling, one that might easily have been forgotten. But Harry's warm grasp of the hand stayed with him all the evening, and for once Sam Bowler was happy alone. He had done something worth doing, and the one for whom he had done it had stepped down to his level and said, "Thank you," as friend would say it to friend. Sam almost began to think he would look out for the opportunity of doing a kindness again.

Meanwhile Fred was hurrying through the streets, and behind him followed Jack. How he had looked for him all this week, how he had wanted him! and yet now he felt almost afraid to show himself, so he only kept near, as near as he could. Fred had no idea he was there, no sense of anything but a great, an earnest longing that the motionless little figure he held would show some sign of life. He could not pass down those roads unnoticed—his wet clothes, his bare head and pale face, the burden he was carrying, all told of some accident; and as he neared the house those who knew him and knew his aunt followed him and pressed behind him in at the door. He did not heed them then, however; he just thought of the shock it would be to the mother, and of the terror of the little sisters. But everything was worth the saving of this little life, so he walked straight into where Mrs. Fraser rose up, pale and trembling, at the sight of his haggard expression and the burden he was bearing.

"It's little Willie," he said briefly; "he's drowned. I'll go for the doctor;" and he gently laid the tiny form in her arms and turned away.

In at the door came the neighbours, crowding around the mother in her speechless grief. All wanted to see him, all wanted to know if he were alive or not. They tried to pour brandy down his throat; they tried one thing and another; and the room was full of noise and confusion when Fred and

the doctor came in. He turned them all out, and then gave himself to do what he could to bring life back again. But his skill could do no good; no look of recognition dawned in those blue eyes, no breath passed those parted lips; and when he rose to go, mother and cousin knew Willie was dead.

Mrs. Fraser locked the street-door after him to keep out those who still lingered near from curiosity, and then the strange calm that had upheld her gave way.

"What will William say?—our only boy, our little Willie. Fred, how did it happen?"

"How did it happen?" The boy shrank from the question; he had not thought during this hour of anxiety and trouble. It seemed as though all the past of his life were cut off and separated from him by the horror of those few minutes' struggle in the water. Dimly, hazily, then, with a sudden flash of vividness that made him shrink from telling, came back the earlier part of that day.

This was how it happened; this was the story Fred had to tell in words he thought the mother would not understand:—

The little boy had welcomed his father home that evening with an entreaty that he would take him to see Fred; and Fraser, having some matters to settle with his brother, consented, and the mother had watched the child, full of health and spirits, dancing gaily by his father's side. Arrived at Princes Row,

William Fraser had found his brother out, and while Willie went off with Fred, Mrs. Fraser supplied his father with something to drink while he waited.

Fraser came in after some time, looking harassed, and placed a bottle on the table.

"I have been driven wild with neuralgia," he said, "and they say a little port is a certain cure." He opened the bottle, and poured out some for his brother, as well as for himself, and then made the nightly glass of brandy and water whilst discussing business matters.

"Me wants some, Willie does," said the child, looking at the wine-glass; and the men laughed as he drained it, and paid no heed to Fred's indignant protest.

"Willie, you shouldn't," Fred said, as he lifted him on to his knee. "Fred does not like it."

"Willie does," the child answered, smiling saucily; but he could not chase the grave look from his cousin's face.

"Come again soon," Fred said, as he gave the little boy to his father.

"Welly soon," he answered, nodding his crown-curved head. Fred watched them till they were out of sight, and saw his uncle stoop to carry the sleepy, tired boy. He could not see a halt that was made at a public-house round the corner; he could not know that afterwards the father's arms could no more bear his light weight, and his hand hardly guide the

lagging footsteps. Fred turned indoors after lingering on the step some time, and as he did so, picked up a piece of paper. "Is this yours, mother?" he said.

"No," she answered; "how tiresome! it is a receipt I promised your aunt before to-morrow. Your uncle must have dropped it."

"I will take it," he said, and went out. He walked briskly, choosing a short cut that led to a bridge made of two planks which crossed the stream ere it joined the river. Careless boy though he was, he never took the child that way; and as he went along, he had no thought of seeing his uncle and cousin before he reached their home. Suddenly, however, his heart seemed to stand still. Through the twilight he saw two figures nearing the place of danger; and before he could reach them, through the silence heard the same ringing cry that drew Harry and Philip to the spot.

The half-intoxicated man had led his boy into danger without a thought, and then, in the effort to guide his own unsteady footsteps, had lost his hold of the little hand. The very effort to realize what was happening seemed to paralyze the father's brain, and he too would have fallen had not Fred's strong hand pulled him back, and flung him on to the grass into instant unconsciousness. Without a second thought, Fred plunged into the quickly flowing stream. On, on it swept, and it was only because the child's clothes

were caught for a moment by a drooping tree that Fred was enabled to catch hold of them at all. It was in vain, however, that he strove to battle with the current. This dead weight was too much for him, and he felt they were being drawn down into the stream together. There was a moment's fierce struggle, and in it his memory brought back to him words that never before had had so real a meaning, "Master, carest thou not?" and then, as he felt all his strength give way, he suddenly saw something black and shaggy swimming towards him. Willie was taken from his grasp in safety, Philip's hand was stretched out to him, and the horror of those minutes that had seemed hours was passed. All since had been hurry and confusion, and the boy had passed through it strung up by excitement and the need of action.

It was in vain, however, that he tried in any measure to conceal what he knew and what he could only infer from the heart-broken woman. A wild light dawned in her eyes as she gathered how the accident occurred, and read what was the cause of it all. It seemed to her for a moment that this was more than she could bear, that her husband, so gentle, so affectionate, should next cross his doorstep as his boy's murderer. How was she to bend to this? how bear so terrible a wrong? Fred stood silent, watching her speechless agony, and meeting her eyes as she looked up, pale and tearless, crying out almost fiercely,—

"Must we bear this for ever? Fred, could he, would he have done this without this hateful drink? Could he have let him go into such danger had he been sober?" No, no indeed; they both could answer that. Affectionate, light-hearted William Fraser could never have done so. There was only one thing that could have transformed the frank, bright, generous man into the miserable creature that lay unconscious upon the river-bank.

Thoughts of what he had been made the momentary bitterness against her husband pass from Mrs. Fraser's mind, and standing by her boy's side she thanked God he was dead. "He liked it, little Willie—his father taught him; and I prayed God his pure lips should not love the drink. And this is the answer, the only answer he could give, for it brings a judgment with it, and he knows I need that, for I have tampered with it too long. Your hands are clean, Fred, for you do not touch what has killed my boy; but standing here by his side, I vow to God from this time forth I will hate this drink for evermore."

"And I too," Fred said in broken tones, for he felt, though he never touched it himself, he had not cared enough about the sorrow it brought to others.

"I must go and fetch him," she said rising, with that patient enduring love that no cruelty or sorrow can destroy. But Fred would not let her. "I'll do that," he said, and wrung her hand. As he turned away, he stumbled over something on the mat, and

looked down, to see the dog still there. He took a light, and read with surprise the name of H. Carden on the collar, and determined to take the splendid creature back to its master so soon as he should have found his uncle. Jack had all this time been standing leaning against the house, listening to every sound; and now when Fred came out he accosted him. Fred had gone through too much already to feel any particular astonishment. He took it almost as a matter of course, though afterwards he wondered how it was that the one for whom he had looked all the week should suddenly have appeared just then.

He could not speak, only nodded to him; and yet he did not shrink from him as he would have done from any other boy just then.

"How is he? has he come to life again?" Jack asked, and Fred answered in a hard, constrained tone, "He is dead;" and then it seemed to flash in upon him as a great, a terrible truth. Willie, his pet, the one thing in the world that he loved, Willie, with all his bright ways, was gone from him for ever. The boy struggled a moment with feelings he could not conquer, and then burst into an uncontrollable fit of weeping. Jack walked beside him silently, his honest heart all full of a deep sympathy. Boys cannot comfort boys in words, however, so he only ventured to slip his arm through Fred's, and to say, "Look here! I'm awfully sorry; I didn't know. I

thought you'd have been in time; it was awfully plucky of you."

"Oh, don't," said Fred; "it was all no good," and he stopped and leaned his arm against a wall, and putting his head down on it, gave way entirely.

Then he straightened himself, and drew his sleeve across his eyes, saying,—

"What a fool I am! There, I won't do it again; come on." It was Fred now who put his arm through Jack's. There was comfort in having some one near him in this hour of sorrow—some one who cared to say, "I am sorry."

They went to look for the prostrate figure on the river-bank, but it was gone, so they sought for him in the public-house, where, unconscious of what he had done, he was drowning a sense that something terrible had happened to him. They led him back to that house of sorrow, and then turned away. Roslyn had made his way into the room, and had laid himself at the foot of Willie's bed. It was useless to try to coax him away, and they were afraid to use force, so Fred promised to let his master know the next morning, and the boys turned away. They said very little, only suddenly they seemed as though they had known each other always.

Jack took Fred home, and left him on his own doorstep. Standing there, the memory of the earlier part of the evening roused his indignation against his parents, for he traced back the sad event to them,

and Fred felt hard and unforgiving towards them. He drew back for a moment to steady himself. How was he to tell them? how was he to keep from breaking down, as he had already done? how command his voice while he said to them, "Willie is dead"? Then he opened the door, and walked in, where, though so late, his parents and sisters still were sitting. His wet clothes, his pale, worn expression drew forth quick, anxious inquiries; but the boy resented them—he could not bear them then. His loss of temper gave him command over his voice and feelings, and he turned almost angrily to his father: "Did you not know what you were doing when you gave uncle wine to drink? didn't you remember he could not stand it?"

Mr. Fraser laughed.

"Will always had a weak head; was that little too much for him?"

Fred could hardly command himself.

"You laugh, you who did it, and go on drinking as though you did not care. Willie's dead! Uncle drowned him as he went home; he let him drop into the river!"

No one laughed then. Mrs. Fraser began to cry; her husband and the girls sat speechless. Then they all poured out questions. How?—When?—Where? Why?—Who saw it? and Fred, already exhausted, could answer no more.

"I've told you all I can," he said; "you must find

out the rest to-morrow. There's your receipt, mother; I could not—"

There was a sudden break in Fred's voice, and a moment after they heard him bang and lock his attic door upstairs. He could not stay in the room through which that merry little voice had echoed so lately, he could not yet recall his roguish, mischievous ways, and calmly tell them how Willie had died.

As soon as he was alone he completely gave way. Sinking into a chair, and putting his arms on the table, he leaned his head down on them, and let his thoughts wander backwards and forwards over the events that had crowded into that evening.

The sight of those little hands, as he had seen them for a moment stretched out that some one might catch them and save him, rose again and again before his eyes. The horrible cause of it all, the *needlessness* of this great sorrow, pressed upon him, and he too felt as though alone in the cold waters of hopelessness, with no one near to help him. Then Jack's figure rose before him, Jack's honest face looking out a sympathy that came from an honest heart, and a yearning for a sight of it again showed Fred that in that hour of sorrow and despair he had learned to need and learned to love this stranger lad.

He was roused at last by Emma's voice at his door calling him to open it. But he only asked wearily what she wanted; and when the answer came that his mother had sent him something to keep him from

taking cold, he flung back bitter words, knowing only too well what that something was likely to be. So Emma went down with the shadow of a smile upon her face, saying, as she shook her head, "It's no good, mother; he's afraid of being like Uncle Will."

Such was all the sympathy, all the help that this lad received in his hour of need from those in his own home.

CHAPTER X.

A HELPING HAND.



SIMILAR circumstances in different ranks of life offer so sharp, so complete a contrast, that it often seems impossible to believe that the hearts that feel and the heads that think are the same, and it is *only* circumstance which has made them to differ.

Harry took Philip home with feelings very akin to those with which Fred hurried through the streets with little Willie's lifeless form. But how different was the scene to which he took him! Carefully lifted from the cab, he was taken to a room and immediately surrounded with every comfort. A note brought Emily from The Elms to nurse and to direct; a letter summoned his father the next morning. There were peace and quietness around him, thoughtful care and constant attention.

No one seemed to know at first what exactly was the matter. The sudden plunge into the water, the strain of helping Fred, had evidently been too much for him; and, struck with the cold, a sudden faintness

had come over him, from which they could hardly rouse him. The doctor seemed to think there was no great cause for anxiety, and Harry tried to believe him; but little rest came to him that night, and he was not selfish in his thoughts. He thought for Fred, and felt for him as well as for himself, and he left his lodgings early to go and seek some one who would go and see after this lad, who for a second time had been thrown in his path. As Harry came down the steps of his house, he saw the one of whom he was thinking running quickly down the road, and, guessing that his errand was to him, he waited. Fred touched his cap as he stopped, and asked at once,—

“Please, sir, how is he—the one that jumped into the water after us?”

“I hardly can say,” Harry answered. “We are afraid he is taken ill. And your little brother, how is he?”

A crimson flush overspread Fred’s face;—this question, that faced him everywhere, that already that morning he had had to answer so often!

“Did not you see?” he answered. “He was drowned.”

“Drowned! dead! I thought there surely was some life. Could they do nothing for him? Walk with me just a little and tell me all you can. Your poor father and mother, what a shock for them!”

“He was my cousin,” Fred said briefly, thinking again of the part his mother and father had had in

that day's events. And then he told him all about it, only concealing *why* the father's carelessness had brought about so terrible a result. "It was good of him to jump in after us," Fred concluded warmly; for, in thinking it all over, Philip's part had roused an ardent admiration in him. "And he didn't know either of us. And your dog, sir, he stayed there all the night, and wouldn't come away. If he had not come, and that young gentleman, we should both have drowned together. I wish," he added almost to himself—"I wish they had saved him instead."

Harry looked down on him; he saw an underlying bitterness. He thought a minute, and then he understood and spoke.

"I think I know how you are feeling now: this is worse even than what made you linger out on the bridge the other night. Shall we face the truth, and then think what to do? Your uncle had been drinking—is not that it?—and he as good as killed that little child; and you are angry with him—angry, perhaps, with those at your own home that do the same. And all seems dark around you, and you wish you were away out of it all, and could get rid of all this misery."

Harry paused for Fred to answer, but he was silent. Every word was true, and a fresh feeling of anger against all around passed through him as he listened; so, taking his silence as an assent, Harry continued,—

"It is always a little bit cowardly to run away out of difficulties—is it not? We none of us like other people to call us cowards. It is a pity we do not feel as ashamed when we are obliged to call ourselves so. You did a brave thing yesterday—dashing into the water to save that little boy who was so fond of you. Would it not be another brave thing to do all you can to try to save his father? And there are others who want saving too. Dear lad, your mother needs a helping hand, does she not?"

Fred winced, but he did not resent the sympathy thus offered him. Harry's tone again exercised that calming influence over him that it had done before. He felt this sympathy was not forced; it came from a heart that had realized his trouble, and was really thinking *for* him—thinking out the right and the best way for him. But still Fred made answer,—

"They *don't* want helping; they don't indeed, and I can't."

"But they do," Harry said; "only they don't know it. But that is no reason why we should not give it them. It is the most wearisome thing in the world to look for anything that is lost; it is more so when that thing has a will of its own, and *will not* be found. But I think, if you could make it your 'duty' for the present to help those who are so near to you, you would find God was helping you. It would give you something to do, something to think and to pray about."

"Think!" "pray!" they were almost new words to Fred in this light. He did not like thinking, and he did not want to pray. It is true that in the darkness yesterday, when he was drowning, he had called out to some One he had hardly ever spoken to before; and he had half thought, when at that moment Roslyn appeared, that He must have heard. But then people always did say prayers when they were in danger of any sort; and yet, and yet he knew he wanted something. He was a fearless boy in what he said, and so, as these thoughts passed through his mind, he answered Harry,—

"We don't think like that. If a man will be bad, why he must; it's his own look-out, and we can't trouble ourselves."

"Would you have liked my friend Mr. Langton to have stood on the bank and said that yesterday when he saw you drowning?"

Fred smiled, and answered, "No."

"Can't you feel as though it were the same? Your uncle has killed some one else; he may kill himself. Your mother may not only ruin herself, but her husband and your sisters too. Can't you *want* to help them? All this about your little cousin may soften them. Will you try now?"

Fred half thought he would; he half wished he could think of it as his duty. But they were reaching The Elms, and they must part; so there was no need to answer.

"Some one shall go and see your aunt, and shall fetch my dog away," Harry said, and Fred looked up gratefully.

"Oh, can some one go this morning?" he said eagerly; and then, afraid he had been rude, he added, "I beg your pardon, sir, but the neighbours were all crowding about, and I thought maybe if some lady went it would quiet her a bit and keep them off."

Harry promised. What was it that prompted those words? What was it made Fred press it earnestly? Some vision of that little room, and busy gossips crowding in and out—of a possible danger for the heart-broken mother? Some passing thought that though this new friend was good and kind he did not really know. Mr. Carden might think it was natural that thoughts such as he had uttered were possible in such a scene, but they were not. "You don't really understand about it," Fred thought. "You don't know what the comfort is they will bring her; you don't know how we talk, how we feel, how apart from all of you—oh, you don't know what we are!"

CHAPTER XI.

TO-DAY—TO-MORROW.

“OW is he? How is Philip?”

The same question came from every one seated around the table in the pleasant breakfast-room at The Elms as Harry entered. Ruth was taking her sister's place, looking bright and pretty. Mr. Barrett was there, the three little boys, and their sister Dorothy. All looked up with the same anxiety.

“We hardly know. There seems no real injury; but he lies quite still, almost unconscious, looking so young and boyish, but so terribly delicate.”

“O Uncle Harry, tell us all about it,” pleaded the boys, pressing round him. “Did Roslyn really save a little boy? Where is he? Why did you not bring him?”

So Harry told the short, sad story, only concealing from them that Willie was drowned. But Frank was not satisfied.

“And the little boy?” he questioned. “Was he only very little—only as big as Dolly? Wasn't he

very glad Roslyn caught him? Was not his mother glad?"

Then Harry had to tell the whole truth, and he watched a deep pity dawn in the boy's eyes.

"O Uncle Harry, what a pity! Was he quite drowned? Why, then, Uncle Philip has got ill all for nothing."

Strange little child, putting into words the very thought that had come into Harry's own mind!

"Nothing is all for nothing," he said; but the child was not attending, and his earnest little face was turned towards the window with a puzzled expression.

"I wonder what mother would do if Dolly were drowned?" he said, looking across gravely at his sister. "She would cry; I know she would. She cried when David was ill. Do you think the little boy's mother is crying? Can't mother go and see her? Uncle Harry, what shall we do for her?"

"That is what has brought me here," he answered. "Ruth, could you go? I want Roslyn fetched away, and I want some one to see this woman. She must be sad, she may be poor. Could you go for me this morning? or are you busy?"

"It is not often I am busy," Ruth replied, a little shortly.

"There is no one else I can ask," Harry went on. "Emily will stay with Philip, and I must be at the bank."

He did not heed her half sarcastic "Oh, that's it, is it?" but heard her reply, "I cannot go alone."

"I'll come with you, Aunt Ruth; do let me, do!" Frank interposed.

"He will be escort enough surely in the morning, will he not?"

"Yes," Ruth answered, still so reluctantly that Harry added a little reproachfully,—

"Emily said you wanted something to do; why, will not this do for a beginning?"

"Emily does not understand," Ruth replied hastily, rising at the same time; "but I'm going, so don't be afraid."

Harry certainly did not understand either. Ruth had only lately come to live amongst them, and seemed as yet to have fitted into no place. She was the youngest of the family, and during the later years of her father's life had been the only one left at home to care for him. So she had had her own way entirely, and had not yet accustomed herself to putting the convenience and pleasure of others before her own.

The boys were racing down the carriage-drive with their uncle, and she stood watching them, holding in her arms the youngest of the party, whom the nurse had just brought downstairs.

"O baby, baby," she said, carrying her out of the window, "I don't believe any one will ever understand. I do want to be good, but they never will

let me as long as they bring me things to do because there is no one else to do them, and give them me, as much as to say, 'This will keep you from wasting your time so utterly.'"

Baby, a speechless, toothless little being of six months, smiled up in her face, thinking it all very delightful, and patted away the shadow of discontent from her aunt's forehead with her small, soft hands.

Meanwhile Frank's busy mind had sped away from the last new object of interest to one that till Harry had appeared had occupied all his thoughts.

"Uncle Harry," he called after him, pressing his small face through the bars of the gate—"Uncle Harry, where's my cricket-bat?"

"I have forgotten it again, Frankie," he answered; "but you may come and fetch it when you and Aunt Ruth come back this afternoon."

"Me too! me too!" cried Hugh and David.

"Yes, all of you," answered their uncle, laughing at their eagerness; "only mind, Frankie, I put you in charge. You are not to play soldiers if I am not in."

He promised, and sped away up the drive to find Ruth, and then forgot why he had wanted her, in the absorbing occupation of making his little sister laugh. They had a merry game, and then, with a sudden gravity, he turned his sweet, earnest face up to his aunt's.

"Aren't you sorry, Aunt Ruth? Don't you want to go?"

Ruth suddenly felt she was not sorry; not like this little boy, who, with his very faint knowledge of sorrow, was trying to grasp this unknown mother's grief. So she evaded his questions; and, seeing that she did so, he said triumphantly,—

“I thought you did not, and I told Hugh so.”

“Why did you think so, Frankie?” she asked, feeling there was some thought in the child's mind unuttered yet.

“Uncle Harry looked as though he thought you didn't; and then, why, mother goes and sees lots of old women, and nobody ever asks her to, not even father. But then I suppose she likes it.”

“I am not good like mother,” Ruth answered, looking down into baby's merry face.

“Are not you, Aunt Ruth?” he said, coming close to her and looking at her curiously; “what a pity! Don't you want to be?” and then he broke into a merry laugh. “Why, I don't believe you could be; you aren't a bit like her, are you? Uncle Harry said you weren't. I wonder what you had better do. You *do* get cross, don't you? and mother never does.”

It was rather depressing to have her faults shown up in this way, but Ruth could not mind. Frank was looking at her gravely with his large earnest eyes as though she were a case he were called upon to consider and pronounce upon.

“What shall I do?” she asked, wondering what his remedy would be. “How shall I get like mother?”

"Nobody's like mother," he answered rather warmly; "and I don't believe you ever could be. But she did tell me what she does. I asked her one day. You ask her too, Aunt Ruth."

"No, you tell me, Frankie," she said, but the boy looked shy.

"It was a lot about loving everybody, because I said I hated Jane, and then she said—O Aunt Ruth, I don't want to tell you, only as mother isn't here, and she can't tell you, perhaps I had better, only don't you really know?" His voice and tone almost demanded an answer, so Ruth said very quietly,—

"Yes, Frankie, I think I do; it is because mother loves God very much."

The boy did not look quite satisfied, and after fidgeting a little he said,—

"Mother put it round the other way: she said it was because God loved her very much, and that makes her love every one, because he does. And then she can't help minding when they do wrong, because it must be a little like what she feels when we are naughty on purpose. She *does* mind; she looks all white and sad, and when baby tries to make her laugh she can't hardly do it. It's when we don't *want* to be good she minds most. That's what makes her say a lot of prayers for people who can't say them for themselves, and so they get to belong to her, and she could not do anything else but want to help them, could she?"

"Frankie, what a strange little boy you are," Ruth said, patting his head. "And are you like mother, and want every one to be good?"

"I don't like Jane yet," he answered meditatively; "not much, only I think it would be rather nice if she were good. And, Aunt Ruth, I think it would be very nice if you were like mother."

"Nice for me, or nice for you, Frank?"

"Oh, nice for you, I meant; but it would be all the same. I do like every one to be happy. Why, baby has nearly gone to sleep; you must take her in."

He rushed off to look for his brothers, while she rose with baby, carrying a very warm feeling in her heart towards her little nephew. "He is the only one who cares what I am or what I do," Ruth thought very unjustly, but his half-expressed thoughts and half-expressed sympathy had been very pleasant to her.

Frank was destined to a bitter disappointment that morning, however. He came rushing out from his lessons all life and sunshine at the appointed hour to find his aunt absorbed in a book.

"It's too hot," she said in answer to his pleadings; "we could not walk all that way in the sun. We will go after lunch."

"O auntie!" he urged, "and I've got my gloves on and everything; and Hugh and David have gone fishing, and they called me a girl and were ever so cross because I was coming with you."

"You can ask nurse to take off your gloves, and you can run after your brothers," Ruth replied, and turned to her book again.

"I can't, though," said Frank, walking slowly away, "and I think it's a horrid shame. 'Tisn't hot a bit," and he turned head over heels to prove it.

But they did not go after lunch either. Ruth had quite forgotten till then that she had asked some friends to afternoon tea; there would not be time before they came, and there certainly would not be time after. She was sorry then, but still it was without very much thought that she dismissed the plan from her mind and spent a pleasant afternoon with her friends.

Frank was entrusted with a message to explain why Roslyn had not been fetched, and started with his brothers to fulfil their engagement at five.

And had Ruth Carden been wanted, could she have carried comfort where it was needed? Might not the very feeling that some one had cared to come through the heat and the glare of that summer day have soothed the mother's broken heart and hindered the sadness that she brought upon herself?

When Mrs. Fraser's little girls awoke the next morning to hear that their pet and their plaything, their only little brother, was dead, the mother put aside her own grief to still theirs, and to hide from them through whose hand this sorrow had come. But

when they had gone to school, and her husband had slunk away almost without a word to his work, when the room was empty, and even in that noisy street the house felt dreary and silent, then the mother's grief seemed past bearing.

Broken-hearted, she paced up and down the room in her restlessness. She put aside the blind and looked out for a minute into the busy, crowded street. There was the vicar knocking at the opposite door. Some one was ill there. She used to go to his church a long time ago. She had taken Willie there sometimes. That very clergyman had christened Willie; would he come to her now? He had been once some weeks back. She watched for the door to open again. Of course he did not know, but still he might hear; the woman he was visiting might surely tell him her little boy was drowned. He might just step across and see her: she had never wanted him before; she did now. The door opened; he stood for a minute on the step looking down at the notes he held in his hand. As he lifted his eyes, surely they rested for an instant on the pale face so near the window. Perhaps they did; but he was a busy man, and the fingers that had almost tapped a summons to him dropped listlessly, as his feet bore him swiftly down the street.

Then a temptation came to this lone woman, a terrible temptation that had never assailed her with such force before. It was to take as her comfort, to make her forget her sorrow, the very thing that had

brought that sorrow. Others did; why should not she? why should she care for any one or anything, when she had been robbed of her dearest, her brightest?

Heartless, hopeless, she almost yielded, almost rose to go out into the glare and noise of the busy street to fetch it, when suddenly something pressed against her, something heavy laid itself on her knee, and as she took her hands from her face she saw the dog with wistful sympathetic eyes looking out the pity he could not speak.

It worked the change that was needed. Her thoughts turned from herself to little Willie, and she shrank back in horror from what she had thought to do. She put down her hand on the faithful creature's head and sobbed out her grief till she was calmer. Then she patted him gently. "We can do no more, doggy; go home."

No one had spoken those words to him before, and they contained a command he had been taught to obey so unhesitatingly that at the sound of the words "Go home," even in this strange voice, he rose up and gently scratched the door. Mrs. Fraser opened it, and he went out into and down the dusty noisy street with his tail hanging down and his head bent low.

The children came in for their dinner and went again, and still the long afternoon was before her. Her work-basket was full of little Willie's unmended things; she could not find occupation there. Then a

neighbour or two dropped in, and she became a little excited, telling the story over and over again, and hearing all they had to say about it.

The afternoon was hot, the little room close, and worn with anxiety and sleeplessness she felt tired. One after another invited her to go and have a cup of tea, and at last she consented.

"She's tired, poor thing," thought Mrs. White as she went across the road to boil the water; and though the gossips of the street had told only too truly how the accident had occurred, Mrs. White never thought of that as she poured a little spirit into the cup of tea that was waiting for the sorrow-stricken mother when she came across. She was almost too accustomed to this small addition to notice it; or if she did, she could not offend Mrs. White by remarking upon it. She had another cup, and another, and felt brightened up and refreshed. It was only a little, it is true, but Mrs. Fraser had had no food all that day, and was exhausted after a sleepless night, and tired, so terribly tired, of the sad thoughts that haunted her. But she rose from that friendly cup of tea not herself, and she knew, as she went back across the road, she had tasted the drink that had killed her boy. She knew too that it had deadened her bitter thoughts; her sorrow was lighter to bear, her desire to talk about it increased. Then again came back that temptation. It is better to be happy, better to drive away this bitter pain at your heart; take more. And now she could not

resist it. She stole into the grocer's shop, where already a bill was standing, and carried away with her a bottle of spirits. She had never done it before, and the man was surprised as he executed her order, for all down the narrow street she was known as the sober wife of a drinking man; "but trouble drives them all the same way," he thought as he watched her out of the door.

"Mother's ill," whispered the children when they came home and found nothing ready for their tea, and taking what they could find, went out to play.

"To-day" and "to-morrow" might sound the same to Ruth Carden as she sat in her sister's pleasant garden, but to this poor woman it made a difference of weeks and months of remorse.

CHAPTER XII.

RESULTS.

AS Harry Carden walked up the steps of his lodgings that afternoon he was made aware of the presence of his three nephews by suppressed laughter and subdued tones, so merry that they would grow loud every now and then. He opened the door rather apprehensively, for only a week previously the trio had paid him a visit, and finding him out, had commenced a sham fight in such earnest that there were real wounds for him to bind up when he arrived. Hence his injunction that morning that they were not to play soldiers; and having put conscientious Frank in charge, he little expected the scene that met his eyes when he entered the room. There was no trace of fear of reproof, however, in the bright face turned towards him.

“O Uncle Harry!” was Frank’s greeting, in a loud whisper, which they had adopted in consideration of Philip, who was in the room overhead, “I *am* glad you’ve come in; you can push the sofa round and

round the room, and then it will be like a real ship. We didn't play soldiers; Hugh wanted to, but I would not let him; but we've had a jolly game of sailors. I'm captain, and Hugh steers, and David lies on his back and holds up the sail. It's your white tablecloth," he explained in answer to Harry's questioning look at a lengthy expanse of white hanging limply from his umbrella and walking-stick lashed together, and supported by the submissive David. "Mrs. Meade left it on the side-board; we haven't crumpled it much. Do help to push, uncle; I can't make it go;" and red with exertion, Frank gathered all his small strength in a fresh effort to propel the heavily laden ship.

"O you boys, you boys," Harry said reproachfully, looking round on the fearful state of disorder to which they had reduced everything. But Frank's earnestness and the merry faces of his brothers were too much for him; and having been informed that his sister was out, and Philip better, but asleep, he joined in the fun. Taking command, he tugged the sofa into port, and ordered it to be unloaded as quickly as possible of the smaller furniture of the room which had been converted into cargo. Things were soon reduced to a certain state of order; and the cricket bat, on being produced, was pronounced rather enviously by Hugh to be "good enough for Frank."

Having obtained possession, their desire to remain with their uncle suddenly vanished, and David pro-

posed the homeward journey. Frank had been too absorbed in his game, and then his present, to think of the message his aunt had given him; and it was only as they were all stealing out of the room as noiselessly as it was possible little boys could do, that the past events of the day came back to him. He stood suddenly still on one leg, longing to follow the others, yet feeling he must make his confession. Child though he was, his quick insight had told him that what was a trifle to Ruth was a matter of no small importance to Harry, so he turned back reluctantly. Harry had not forgotten, but seeing Roslyn safe at home, he had not wished to bring any shadow across his merriment by reference to the sad event the child had so taken to heart. He was stooping down to caress his favourite, when he suddenly became aware that one small nephew was still standing near him, and he lifted his head, to meet Frank's eyes looking wistfully at him, and to hear him say,—

“Uncle Harry, we did not go.”

“What do you mean, Frankie?” he answered, not understanding; “the others are half way down the square.”

“Uncle Harry,” he said again very sympathetically, and coming across the room, “we did not go, not auntie and me, and I *am* sorry for the poor boy's mother.”

Harry had a hasty temper, and in spite of the presence of the child he failed to control himself.

"You did not go to Mrs. Fraser? Can I trust no one? Must I see everything going to ruin, and be the only one to do anything? Go back to your aunt, Frankie, and tell her I am disappointed, and I am coming to see her."

This sudden reaction was too much for Frank after all the excitement and romping of the last hour, and at his uncle's harsh, hasty words he burst into tears.

"Run along, Frank, there's a good boy." Harry tried to speak gently, but the boy did not move; his generous little soul wished to right his aunt.

"I think she is sorry, uncle; she said she was. She couldn't go this morning, and afterwards there were lots of visitors."

"First would not, then could not; I see," said Harry sternly. "She did not think, could not perhaps. Run home now, Frank," and the child went with reluctant steps. He found his brothers in a high state of indignation at his delay, and having yielded up his bat to them, he crept away by himself, feeling thoroughly out of heart.

Hugh declared to the nursery world that Frank was crying when the lights were low and the brothers safe in bed for the night; but no one believed him till mother came home and went up to see her boys. What was it? she asked again and again, when she drew down the clothes and saw the tear-stained face. Frank told her reluctantly, for it seemed to him like telling tales. But mother knew what to say, and

she stroked back the hair from his hot little forehead as she told him how, ever since he was quite a little boy, Uncle Harry had had this strong bad temper to fight against, and what hard work it was for him. So she talked on till the tears were gone; and then by-and-by Uncle Harry came up to say he was sorry, and Frank told him what mother had said.

Harry came down to find Ruth in the garden; her merry laugh ringing across the lawn guided him to where she was. Mr. Barrett left them alone, and Ruth plunged into the subject immediately.

"O Harry! I am ashamed to see you. Frank has told you we did not go. I was lazy this morning, and this afternoon I had an engagement. You dear old fellow, you look so solemn, won't you forgive me?"

"I have been myself," Harry answered.

"And you wanted to stay with Philip. O Harry, why did you? I meant to go to-morrow."

"Ruth, what a child you are! Will you never learn that there are some things which must be done to-day? It was not a case of wishing to go or not; it was simply duty. It is so easy to say I am sorry, and never to think where it is all leading to."

His tone was gentle, and little knowing how much her light manner fretted him, Ruth burst out with, "Harry, you really *are* good. I thought you would have been angry with me. To think of your rushing off all that long way, and then not delivering your soul of a sermon."

"But I must give you a little sermon though, Ruthie. You never let any one speak to you, and you have done a wrong thing to-day. You have put yourself where you should not be—first. Let me tell you where I went and what I found. The world says, 'Don't tell me these things, don't let me know, let me forget that there is sin and sadness and sorrow all round;' but if there is the least wish in our hearts to help others, we must know. These Frasers live in one of the far-off narrow streets. Scores of children were playing noisily as I passed, men were loitering about, women passing to and fro, public-house doors were swinging backwards and forwards, our country's curse rested heavily over that street. As I walked down, some little quarrel arose between two women, and the children all around ran up to see what was the matter, and they never shuddered at the vile words they heard, or turned away from the torrent of coarse language that was flung from one to the other. They were *accustomed* to it, and down in that crowded, dirty street they laughed at it, they smiled at the very wickedness of it, and turned again to their play. I could not help thinking, if it made us sad, what sorrow there must be among their angels in heaven over these sin-stained little lives. As I knocked at the door three little girls ran up to me, one fair and sweet as our little Dolly. Though her face was anything but clean, and her hands and dress were grimed with the dust in which she was playing,

there was something pure and beautiful about the child. Yet she too was *accustomed* to all around her. I had already noted her as the one whose glee was the greatest at the momentary street excitement. They came to see what I wanted, and shook their heads when I asked for their mother. They looked ashamed, and were silent when I inquired why, if she was in, I could not see her. Then hearing our voices, a fellow lodger came down, a rough, kind-hearted Irish woman, and the lie she told me to screen her friend revealed the truth, and, Ruthie, it seemed impossible. I do not say we could have prevented it, but we might have tried. Is it not terrible that she, a mother, should have known nothing to comfort her but that cursed drink? that those who went to her in her sorrow should only have brought her this, and that she should have found relief only in what made her forget. Think of her living within reach of our sympathy, and drifting in her grief so far away from all real comfort."

"It is horrible, certainly; but they ought to be able to control themselves, and you speak as though I were to blame," Ruth answered a little impatiently.

"Ought! do any of us do what we ought?" Harry answered with a touch of bitterness he did not mean. "Everything else is so far away from them, this one thing so hatefully near. But look away from her side to ours. We are the only ones who knew of her sorrow; and if this is the result of our want of

thought, we are responsible, we must strive to undo it, and to be more *ready* to do our duty. Those children would haunt you had you seen them. When I asked where their father was, they pointed to the public-house across the road; and there they were, three lone little maidens, with no one to think for them at all just then. You did not think of such possible results when you stayed at home this morning and took your leisure hours for yourself."

"No, I did not; and, Harry, I really am sorry, only I do think you are rather unjust, and I cannot feel as you do."

"When will you learn, Ruthie, that we are brothers and sisters all the world over, and the only way to fight these battles is hand in hand? Now I must go. Think over it all a little; and if you feel you still want something to do, I have plenty waiting for you; and if you want to know how to do it, ask Frank what he does with the troubles that are too great for him."

Ruth was silent. She was sorry; but still the uppermost thought in her mind was not her sorrow, it was that Harry was unjust.

When she spoke again it was in a different tone.

"Aunt Gracey is home," she said.

"Aunt Gracey!" A tone of rest and content stole into Harry's hitherto grave and troubled voice, and he did not heed Ruth's half contemptuous words,

"You can go and pour out your woes to her now," as he asked, "Is she better, Ruthie? have you seen her yet?" then checked himself. "I forgot though, you have been busy."

He meant nothing, and he was not thinking of her. But Ruth was susceptible; she thought she discovered an implied judgment in an accent she traced on the word "busy." Her face flushed angrily, and she startled her brother by bursting out vehemently,—

"I *was* busy; and it is too bad of you to set up rules for yourself and expect every one to follow them. I was as busy as you, and doing my duty as well. You are hard on me, Harry, and you will make me hate everything you call right."

Harry looked down on her, thinking perhaps he had been too severe. Ruth's life seemed to him to be one long holiday. He had looked forward to her coming amongst them. Their youngest sister, she had always been their pet, and her bright face and cheerful voice were very welcome amongst them. She was not pretty, but her dark eyes and hair, her merry expression and bright colour made her face an attractive one. She could be bitterly sarcastic, and lately this had brought a discontented look around her mouth that spoiled her ready smile and destroyed the open look that once she used to wear. Harry noticed this as he looked down on her now, and he wondered what brought it there as he answered,—

"You misjudge me, Ruthie. I meant no such

thing. I know you were busy, dear, and rightly too. I am glad Emily has you to help her; we were glad when we heard you were coming; and, Ruthie, I hoped you would help me too. But never mind; I will not ask you again; only, child, you looked just now as though there was something missing in your life, and I wondered if it was the feeling that you were some use."

Ruth would not bear that: what right had any one to think of her, and what right had any one to think so truly? She shrugged her shoulders lightly and turned away, half afraid what more her brother might say.

She need not have feared. Harry was looking at his watch, but he put it in his pocket, saying, half to himself, that it was too late to go and see his aunt, then wished Ruth good-night, and was gone—he alone to his friend that was ill, she alone back into the garden shades, both misunderstanding each other.

As Harry went up his steps a hand touched his, and a voice asked, "Is he better?"

"Mr. Langton? No, my lad, not yet. Do you know him? shall I take any message?"

The boy shook his head, and before Harry could say any more, he was gone away into the darkness, and Harry forgot him as he entered the silent room where Philip lay, and spent an hour by his side before he took the rest that he so needed.

CHAPTER XIII.

SATURDAY NIGHT AND SUNDAY EVENING.



JACK and Fred had met, and they had met to find they were friends, and that the life of neither could henceforth be complete without the other. Both were conscious of this, and the next thing was how to meet again.

Jack was working steadily with the blacksmith, and Fred had also found a place, after long searching. It was at a second-class eating-shop, and he had drawn down upon himself the wrath of his whole family by taking a situation as assistant in such a place. It had once been supposed that the Frasers were better off than most of the inhabitants of Princes Row, and they liked to keep up the appearance of being so. Fred's step they considered lowered himself and lowered them, and Annie could not forgive him. He had done it, however, from an honest sense of duty. He hated to be a burden to his father, and he could find nothing else. It is true his whole soul revolted against it; carrying out dishes and serving hungry

customers was distasteful to him in the extreme; but he felt he would rather do that than nothing. He had to smart under unpleasant remarks; he had to put up with being told at every turn he was not such a gentleman after all; and between himself and these uncongenial surroundings he built up a silent wall of pride. He *knew* he was fit for a better position; he knew he had a brighter intellect than most, and a clear head that enabled him to use it; and he showed the contempt he felt for his detractors only too openly.

There was another thing that had jarred on him more than this, however. He had turned away from Harry, wishing to follow out the line of duty that, drawn by him, seemed noble and worth living. He had gone home, to find an excited party in the sitting-room. They had just learned the ins and outs of the previous night's events, and were boasting of his daring and his courage to those who had gathered to hear. Day after day it was the same. He heard the circumstances overdrawn; he heard Willie's name thrown lightly backwards and forwards. They would turn to him for further details, and question him again and again about that terrible evening. At first he tried to stand it,—this should be the first disagreeable duty he should set himself; but gradually it grew beyond bearing. His answers were curt, his temper morose, and he was glad that his work kept him so much from home.

Between his father and himself also there had fallen a great silence. It was as though the man was ashamed of having been found by his son weeping over his sorrows; ashamed also, perhaps, of the words in which he had acknowledged the presence of the enemy that had eaten all joy out of his life, all comfort out of his home. Remembering his manner on that evening, Fred had looked to him for sympathy in his attempt to rescue, and the loss of, little Willie. But he had met with none; his angry taunt had made his father feel the part that he had played, and he was afraid of more home-quarrels should he refer to it.

So Fred's life was in very deed a sad one at this time; and there was no rest in it, no moments of real relaxation. There was either his daily distasteful occupation, or the sense of the blank Willie's death had made, or the trying home-life—Annie wrangling with him, Emma's constant flow of foolish and selfish chatter, and Jim's—there was certainly little to complain of there. Fred never spoke to Jim unless he wanted him to go an errand. And then, to make the circle of trouble more complete, there were his uncle's heartlessness and his aunt's incomprehensible conduct.

The coroner's jury had brought in a verdict of accidental death; but there was no hiding how the event had taken place. The local papers called it "a sudden dizziness" on the part of father or of child;

but all knew better than that, and up and down Willow Walk it was known how Willie had died.

But now Saturday evening had come,—Saturday evening when every one seemed to have some shopping to do or some errand to go. Busy, eager men and women were hurrying to and fro, each one intent upon his or her own business, yet each forming part of a moving crowd.

Fred took his tea hastily, and went out, making one of the many; but he heeded them little. There was only one wish in his heart,—only one thing he was wanting, and that was Jack. And hurrying towards him, filled with the same wish and the same want, was the lad from the country looking for him.

Jack Carter's first wonder and interest in all around him had begun to wear off; he was getting accustomed to busy surroundings and active pursuits, and their novelty was gone. So it was heedless of what might be passing near him that he mingled with the crowd and wandered on, scanning all faces anxiously, it is true, but scanning them with the one hope of seeing amongst them the one for whom he searched.

Presently they met, suddenly and unexpectedly, and a feeling of rest stole into both hearts as they turned arm in arm into quieter streets. Even in this short time they were both different from the day when first they saw each other. Then Fred had run from home in a boyish fit of temper; now he was

carrying about what seemed to him a man's anxiety and sorrow. And as for Jack, his ignorance of much evil had been destroyed, his simplicity had been broken in upon, and though not much tarnished nor much hardened yet, he was no longer a typical country-boy.

They had plenty to tell each other. Jack, with his strong brother's love for the Robbie he had left, wanted to hear and to know about Willie; so as they flung stones into the flowing river or sauntered along the bank, they had many things to say. So they walked and they talked, and behind them, unknown, a form was treading in the darkness.

Unseen by either boy, as they had turned from the streets on to the river-path, Sam Bowler had dashed round a corner. He had caught sight of Jack's figure in the distance, and not seeing who was beside him, had yielded to a sudden desire to speak to the lad he so liked. He ran after him, and not till he drew near did he see that it was Fred whose arm was linked with Jack's. Instantly the almost love he felt for Jack quickened into hate the feeling of dislike he harboured towards Fred. It kept him walking after them, forming plan after plan to shake the confidence of one in the other, and to destroy Jack's faith in Fred.

He kept them in sight till they said good-bye outside the house where Jack now lodged, and when Fred was gone, Sam sped down the street to observe

the number on the door. As he finished his observations, the handle turned, and Jack came out. He had forgotten some small purchase he had intended to make. He saw Sam at once, and with a sudden shrinking from him would have passed him with a nod, but the elder lad stepped up to him.

"That's not a very civil way to treat a feller as gived ye yer first night's lodging in Bransdale," he said.

Jack looked up into his ugly face with his honest eyes, and perhaps read there a glimmering of the hungry longing that at that moment made the lad's soul bitter. Yet it was hard to be grateful for the mixture of good and evil that had been brought into his life that night, so he answered,—

"I do not know you yet. What is your name?"

Sam gave it, and Jack went on to ask where he worked.

"Work!" he said disdainfully. "'Taint much work the like o' me does."

Jack looked him over. Those ragged, thread-bare clothes, that shock hair, that hat with broken crown—Jack understood it was hardly likely any master would employ him.

"Then what do you do?" he asked.

"Do! Why, anythink; picks up money easy that way; no masters and wages."

"Oh, tell me how!" Jack answered, visions of help he might send his mother rising up before him.

He had always heard money was easy to get in towns; perhaps now he should learn how to get it.

"'Specs there's little enough to tell," said Sam, fighting shy of pointed questions.

"Doesn't your father work either?" Jack asked next, for he was getting interested and forgetting how he distrusted the rough lad.

"Ain't got none," answered Sam.

"Then your mother; doesn't she have to work neither?"

"Ain't got no mother," said Sam again.

"Haven't you got any one?" said Jack, turning up at him a face full of sympathy.

"Don't want no one," said Sam doggedly.

"And you've got no home! Then where do you sleep?"

"Anywheres; mostly where you did that first night."

"Then you've nothing—nothing but yourself? I say, don't you"—Jack hardly knew how to put it—"don't you get tired of yourself?"

"'Specs as I don't think nothink about it. Look here, youngster, it's no good yer a-pityin' of me. I knocks along just any'ow. They'll tell yer I'm a bad un, but I won't never do yer no harm. That young Fraser'll set yer against me if he can. All I says is, let me come and see you sometimes."

Jack's honest heart was troubled. He had never

known any one like this before, and he felt filled with sorrow for this lonely lad and his badness; and because he had not yet learned how town-boys laugh at such things, he spoke out his thought.

"Oh, I am sorry," he said,— "I am sorry you like being bad. Can't you try to do right? don't you want to?"

And up through Sam's dark soul came struggling a feeling responsive to this pity. Some one in the great world was sorry he did wrong, and he wished he could answer "Yes" to that question. But under this new softening influence Sam was honest with himself, and with a fierce "No," he turned abruptly away, and was gone. No, no, he cried to himself; his business always had been to do evil; he knew how to do nothing else. He was bound down to it by a chain he had forged himself. Pure, sympathetic eyes that seemed to him to have seen the blackness within him and not to have shrunk away from it—he would forget them, he would never go near them again, or they would spoil the only life that he knew how to live. And because he felt he was not worthy of this pity, he grew more angrily envious against Fred, for he felt that he *was* fit to be this new-comer's friend.

Yes, Jack *was* sorry. It was no passing remark. To him it seemed too sad to be possible that a boy not much older than he should be hardened and evil like Sam Bowler. There rose before him a picture

of a whole life of solitude and wickedness, and Jack no longer feared to meet with Sam.

He opened the subject when he met Fred on Sunday afternoon, as they had appointed to do. But Fred blazed forth upon him in angry words. He had not known that Jack and Sam had met, and his feeling was so bitter towards the latter that he uttered harsh, cruel words of him.

"But he is bad," Jack answered with a simplicity Fred failed to understand.

"Bad! He's worse than bad; he's a thief and a liar. I wonder Bransdale is not too hot for him already!"

"What makes him so?" Jack asked.

Who could answer? Fred certainly could not, so he only said, "S'pose he wants to be."

Back to Jack came that fierce "No" of the night before, but he had felt it was only so fierce because Sam wished that it were "Yes." So he asked again,

"Does any one try? Does any one care for him?"

"Not likely," said Fred; "he can take care of himself."

"But he can't; and he's bad. I wish Mr. Davis were here to see him," Jack said.

"Whatever for? I did not know he was such a friend of yours. Perhaps you would rather be with him now?"

The quick colour mounted to Jack's cheeks, an angry answer trembled on his lips, but instead of

giving it, he turned round with the frank hearty way that was natural to him.

"Aren't you ever sorry for any one but yourself?"

And Fred smiled as he answered, "No; I don't bother myself, and certainly not about the likes of Sam."

So Jack put away his thoughts and his plans till he should be alone; but the glimpse he had had of Sam's heart and life had filled him with horror. Endowed with a sympathetic nature, he had been brought face to face for the first time in his life with some one utterly, hopelessly bad, and he had grasped the sadness of it all, and after the first shrinking back, looked only with sorrow on this boy and his sin-clouded life. Also, he did not wish to hurt Fred. His feeling towards him was very different from that towards Sam. The first ardent admiration had not worn away; and though, as he had seen more of his passionate nature and changeable moods, it may have modified a little, he still looked up to him, trusted him perfectly, and understood him as no one else had done. And Fred on his part had attached himself more and more to Jack, and he so trusted him that he never revolted against the feeling that it was good to be with him. But across their love that afternoon there had passed the first faint shadow of approaching trouble. Fred was exacting. In his friendship he would demand love for himself, and himself alone; and the tone of Jack's voice when he spoke of Sam

Bowler caused a sudden feeling of jealousy in his heart. The conversation was turned, however, almost before he was conscious of it, and for the present Fred knew not of the enemy that he was harbouring. The boys spent the afternoon in the woods of Bransdale village, and were beginning to turn homewards when the bells of the old church broke suddenly upon their ears. They stood and listened awhile, held silent by their sweet music, the only sound that broke the stillness round them. No thought that they concerned him came to Fred till Jack said suddenly, "Shall we go?"

Fred looked to see if he were in earnest, and in that brief pause before he answered came back to him the horror of those moments of struggling in the water, the longings in him Harry Carden's words had roused, vain strivings that all the week had risen and been quenched in him. Religion had been brought before him in a new light. Harry had spoken it. He began to feel Jack lived it; he began to know he wanted it. Prompted by such thoughts, and knowing too that there he should meet none that knew him, he answered, "I don't care; yes, if you like."

So they went, and as they walked into the calmness and peace of the churchyard, the longing for that unknown something he wanted grew greater. The bells had ceased as the boys entered. The pew-opener looked doubtfully at them for a minute, and then showed them into a seat at the far back, where

already a few lads were gathered. They none of them had prayer-books, and the curate's voice only reached them faintly from the distance, and all through the service they fidgeted and distracted one another. Fred could not help watching them, and he too grew restless. He looked now and again at Jack, but he did not seem to heed them. He was back again in Ringdown in imagination, and uttering the familiar words, he began to feel that after all he and his friends were not so far apart. Fred heard his voice joining in the service; and as he saw the other boys laughing among themselves at his earnest manner, he felt half ashamed of him. Then the feeling changed to envy. It all meant something to Jack, and to him it meant nothing; it was no good trying to listen and follow. Then suddenly his attention was aroused by a name that had been often in his mind. The clergyman was asking them to pray for Philip Langton. Then he must be very ill—dying. Fred sat back in the pew, and became unconscious of everything in following out this train of thought. Dying! then it was because he had tried to save him. It was just his fate; he brought trouble to every one. He did not want him to die; he had tried to save Willie, and besides he was Mr. Carden's friend. He wondered if all these people really cared, and if their praying would make any difference. He wondered—but the organ was playing, and the people standing up to sing, and Fred's wondering was

for the time brought to a close. The pew-opener passed them books. Fred had a good voice; the tune was a familiar one, and he joined in it heartily. One or two looked round to see where those clear musical notes were coming from; but the boy, unconscious, sang on. He never thought of the words, but the mere fact of singing and joining with those around him did him good. He looked up at the clergyman as he came into the pulpit, and he felt that he could listen to him, that he should like to; he wanted to hear something new and true. He listened to the text. It was about the young ruler who, with all his riches and all his commandment-keeping, yet felt an empty longing in his heart for something more, and came to seek eternal life from One he had heard could give it. Almost new, through never being thought of, Fred liked the verses, and they interested him as the preacher read them in clear, earnest tones. The boy's attention was thoroughly arrested, and he prepared to listen intently. But the words all flowed over his head. He had a dim idea that all that was said was good and true. But none of it was meant for him; not a sentence came near or touched his life. There was not one word to interest him further. The preacher had not thought perhaps that amongst those gathered to hear him would be a lad with a hungry heart which it might be his to satisfy; and he read on, unconscious of what one of his hearers was thinking. After trying again and again to listen, Fred

gave up the attempt, and let his thoughts wander where they would. He looked round at the other people; they all seemed attentive. He supposed they knew about it, and so could understand. And then he looked at his companions in the pew. One by one they were dropping off to sleep; only Jack sat erect, but Fred saw by his face that he too had failed to follow, and that his thoughts had gone from Bransdale back to Ringdown.

They rose again to sing when the sermon was ended, but now Fred pushed away the hymn-book Jack wanted to share with him. He felt as though hurt and ill-used, and he thrust one hand discontentedly into his pocket as they ended the service with the evening hymn, "Abide with me."

The sleeping boys had all woke up with a start when the congregation rose, and at the first movement went hurrying out of the church. Fred walked moodily after his friend, and joined him with the words, "Catch me going there again."

Jack had been thinking he would find his way every Sunday to that quiet, almost countrified little church, and this remark was rather startling.

"Oh! but, Fred," he answered, "it's right to go to church."

"It may be right for you, but it isn't for me. Look here now! what *was* he talking about?"

Brought face to face with the question, Jack was obliged to confess he did not know, and Fred con-

tinued, "Well, I tell you I don't believe he was talking about anything or to any one. I don't believe he knows a bit of what it is like now, say, in Willow Walk. I don't believe he knows what it is to hear people swearing at you all day, and to find yourself doing and saying things that you hate yourself for after. Now he ain't a bit like Mr. Carden. He's sharp; he knows a thing or two, and don't mind saying so. And I tell you what, I haven't been brought up like you have, and we don't ever speak about these things, not mother nor none of us; we don't go to church or anything, and I am like them. I'm not a bit better; I don't go, and I don't care either—"

Then suddenly finding he had been making quite a long speech, Fred broke off and smiled, and then laughed. It was Fred's own self breaking through the gloom and the sorrow of these past days. He had hardly smiled since Willie's death. And it did him good. The bitter thoughts that had prompted the unusual flow of words were thrown aside, a light came into his eyes, his brow grew smooth, and his own bright, boyish manner came back. It was infectious. Jack laughed too, and saying affectionately, "Don't make yourself out too bad, old fellow," he willingly turned the conversation into other channels.

They had walked down through the village as they talked, and now turned back again, as it was getting late. As they neared the church again, Jack paused,

and with an exclamation leaned over the low wall that separated the cottage gardens from the dusty road.

The garden was like others they had passed, in some ways, and yet not in others. There was an indescribable something about it that made Fred, directly he turned at Jack's exclamation, look up at the cottage to see how it differed from those near at hand. The walls were gray flint, the roof was tiled, the windows were small, and shaded by the creepers that grew over the porch and were trained along the walls. There was nothing he could define as marking a difference, and it was certain, if the inhabitants were not cottagers, they wished their dwelling to be as much as possible like those by which they were surrounded.

Jack was not noticing all this, however; he was leaning over the wall looking eagerly at a flower.

"Isn't it a beauty?" he said. "Father was the only one in Ringdown as ever grew them near like that. He took a prize for it nigh every year, and I looked after it when he was ill."

To Fred it appeared like any plant or flower; but as it interested Jack, he turned to look at it, and listened as he told where his father had procured the one for which he had cared so long and tenderly. Jack was just about to tear himself from it when the door was flung open, and Frank, his face flushed with hurry and excitement, bounded out. The boys drew back hastily.

"Oh, don't," he panted; "you can have one. I was

afraid I shouldn't be in time. I heard you, and then I had to run all the way down the garden and back again to ask Aunt Gracey. Did you really have a garden of your own? I have one, but then you see I can't grow anything like this, it's so slow. I like things that come quick, like mustard and cress, or that I can dig up and see how they are getting on, like crocuses; it doesn't hurt them much. Have you got a garden still?"

"Oh, what a pity!" as Jack shook his head. "I don't suppose you'd care to see mine, and I'm afraid I mustn't ask you. Aunt Ruth said I was to give you the flowers, and then go back again to her. I was to pick three—one for each of you, and one to take to your mother." He gave Fred the one, and put the two into Jack's hands, and smiling and nodding, sped away again.

Fred had drawn back a little, and now he stood holding the flower a little shyly in his hand, and he waited for Jack to move on. But the country lad was silent too. The sight of that garden had brought back home and father, and Frank in his sweet thoughtfulness had given him something to take to his mother; and strange though it may seem, for the first time since he left home, a feeling swept over Jack that he had done wrong to desert his mother.

Fred's voice broke the silence, calling him to go on, and they went together. As they said good-night, Jack held out his second flower.

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"You had better take it," he said. "He thought we were brothers. Your mother is nearer than mine."

"She's as far as yours for as much as she'll care," Fred answered as he shook his head. But Jack left it in his hand.

"Here's a flower for you, Jim," Fred said, meeting his brother on the doorstep, and the boy took it eagerly. Careless of the gift though he seemed, Fred took care to give Jim the one Jack had passed on to him, and the other was carried upstairs, and looked at and tenderly touched for a minute or two.

Then he took down his New Testament from the shelf—a book he never opened, and he well knew no one else did. He laid the flower between the leaves, closed it again and replaced it, and the petals unguided rested against the words, "And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm."

He could not have said why he chose to preserve this unknown child's gift. Perhaps because it was novel, perhaps because his heart was very tender towards all little boys just then for Willie's sake; or it may be that a foreshadowing of the future swept over either spirit then, and made the child's eyes meet the boy's as he gave his simple gift.

"He was a nice boy, Aunt Gracey," Frank exclaimed, as he rushed over the lawn to the river-side. "He wasn't a bit like Bransdale boys. But I liked the other best, though I don't believe he wanted the flower."

"You queer little boy, Frank ; why did you like him then ?" Ruth asked.

He turned to the elder lady.

"Aunt Gracey, he did not want it, and I do like giving things to people who don't want them. He looked so sad you would have liked him ; and so would Uncle Har—no, I think Uncle Philip would have liked him best. He looked—O Aunt Gracey, he looked as though he would be a soldier some day."

They both laughed. It was always the climax of Frank's ambition for himself, and therefore the highest compliment he could pay to predict such a destiny for another.

It was getting late, and Ruth turned to give her arm to her aunt and to help her indoors.

CHAPTER XIV.

AUNT GRACEY.

FRED'S quick sense had told him right when he had glanced from garden to house, and decided the owner was no cottager; and yet it was Miss Gracey's pride that her little dwelling should be as much as possible like those around her. She was the centre and mainspring of all that was done in the village; and she knew it helped her to guide her people, that they should feel her amongst them, and one with them in their country life.

This little straggling hamlet was very dear to her, and she, like all who lived in it, was proud to think she belonged to the village, and not to the busy town that mushroom-like had sprung up across the river and stolen their name and their rights. They had a history, and the town had none. It had been theirs, in the days of England's civil wars, to offer a hiding-place to fugitives; and it was in the graveyard round their church that the few celebrities who had looked back to Bransdale as their birthplace lay sleeping.

Quiet though the exterior of the house was, it did not lack comfort within. There were large rooms and little rooms, and all sorts of queer out-of-the-way rooms that can only be found in old country houses; and Aunt Gracey's home-coming was a signal at The Elms for all sorts of hopes of long games of hide-and-seek up and down the many passages, and Saturday afternoon generally saw the three brothers hastening eagerly towards the cottage.

She had been away from them all for so long that there were many glad welcomes awaiting her, and amongst the warmest that which Ruth brought when she and Frank came in after evening service. Ever since she had come to Bransdale, Ruth had chosen to cross the river to attend the old church where long ago she had gone so often, and one of the boys always went with her. Her chosen seat was far at the back; and she had noticed the stranger lads linger in the porch, and then come in. She had seen the others fall asleep, and had listened more for the two who she saw wanted to hear than for herself that night. Never before had Ruth thought how little the English of the rich is the English of the poor, and she had understood how meaningless the words had sounded to the boys.

Ruth had felt sorry for them; and when Frank had rushed out to tell of Jack's exclamation, and to beg he might give the flower, she had turned to her aunt to speak of the thoughts that had come to her.

"Aunt Gracey," she said, "what is to be done for them? They must come to church, because they want something; and if they can't understand what is given them there, what is to be done? They reminded me so of what Harry and Philip used to look like years ago. One was dark and the other fair, fairer even than Philip; and I was wondering if they were going home to any friends, or if they went away feeling troubled and disappointed, and had no one to tell it to. Harry always brought everything to you to be set straight, he was always so moody and restless; and Philip,—I have often heard you say how wild and wilful he was. If they had been poor boys, would they have been bad boys, do you think? And these two, will they be bad just because there is no one to do for them what you and Emily did for our two?"

"These are hard questions to answer, Ruthie; and I have often done as you have, and contrasted the happy boyhood of our lads with what seems the hard struggle of those in a lower class. The feeling that they have no one to turn to has been the one to drive many to a downward course. The home influence is bad; all outside influence is hardening; and in their own hearts there is so sadly little knowledge of good."

"Aunt Gracey, it may be wrong," Ruth said, speaking impetuously, and, as her aunt knew as soon as she heard the words, with an effort, "but it does seem

strange that God looks down and sees it all, and lets life be so glad to some and so hard to others. It seems like wasting lives that are meant for some purpose to leave them to sink to a low level because no one stretches out a hand to help them. And is it not hard that it should be the *boys*, the very ones who have the power of getting enjoyment out of everything, that they should be the ones to be assailed by evil on every side, and have their lives spoiled for them by it?"

"Ruthie, I think afterwards we shall wonder to see how God *did* care—how where we saw all darkness he was making light. Little influences are constantly passing into lives we think untouched; and where we think that evil holds its own, he speaks sometimes. But much is left undone because we are thoughtless and lazy. Do you care for these boys then, Ruthie child? have you tried to help them while I have been away?"

"Oh no," she said quickly. "I could not; I do not know how."

"And could not Harry or Emily help you?"

Ruth shook her head. "They are far beyond me; they do not understand."

"Is the lesson still unlearned, then? Has not the dreaming given place to doing? You must spare a little time to come over and help me. I have not told you yet, Ruthie, that the doctors have sent me home without hope of getting better. My long

absence has done me no good. I shall never be stronger than I am to-night. I must lie here and wait while I get worse very slowly ; so I shall want you."

Ruth's face had flushed at Miss Gracey's questions ; and then the quiet words that followed wrung a little cry of pain from her. Any answer she was about to make was checked, however, by the sound of a quick, firm step outside, and Harry came in at the window.

Ruth rose to her feet, while Miss Gracey looked up brightly.

" At last ! how is he ? "

" Better. That is why I am here. He had a long sleep, and awoke quite himself. "

Harry sat himself down almost wearily in an easy-chair, and Ruth went out of the window and left the aunt and nephew alone together. She went down to the river, and stood leaning over the wall watching the ceaseless flow of the dark waters. Since her father's death, she had looked to and loved Miss Gracey more than any other friend, and her heart was filled with bitterness to think that her aunt's old active life was at an end for ever, and that her life henceforth must be that of an invalid. It seemed too much, that slow losing of strength looked too wearisome ; and standing there in the darkness, Ruth questioned why such sadness need be for one who was so necessary to them all, such a friend to every one who knew her.

Meanwhile indoors Harry was talking over all that had come to him lately. He told how it had all happened; and as the sad circumstances connected with the accident came back in their freshness, a troubled look came into his face and a stern tone crept into his voice. He did not complain, and he said no word of his disappointment in Ruth, but Miss Gracey saw and answered it.

"Do not despair; she is only young yet."

"She has been young so long," he said dejectedly. "Do you know what it is to feel alone, Aunt Gracey, as though things were waiting to be done on every side, and people all going wrong, because those who ought to help them will not?"

"To feel that there is no one able and willing to do anything but yourself? I understand. No wonder you are down-hearted—responsible for every one's wrong-doing, and all the world cold and heartless."

"Don't laugh at me, Aunt Gracey. It is every bit true, and all I have done one day has been undone the next. Even the little you left me here in Bransdale has come to grief."

"Don't think me heartless, but you have been working the wrong way lately. I have been away out of it all where the sounds have reached me only in muffled tones, and it is a strange waking up to come back and find all really the same as when I left it. I have learned many fresh things though; and now I cannot carry them out, you must do so for me."

"But, Aunt Gracey," he interposed, "we shall have you about amongst us again. What would Bransdale do without you?"

"We will leave that to-night, Harry. I am only feeling so glad to be back amongst you, and to see all your dear faces round me. I cannot talk much more, but there is one thing I would say to you,—do not waste your time in everlastingly going back and trying to patch up things that you and others have left undone. Do not let the feeling become a permanent one that you are *behindhand*, and it is all a drive. God is never behindhand with his work; and it is his we are doing, not our own. It is here you have failed; and while you are wasting your time over some blunder in the last, you are neglecting the next duty, and so marring the chain of events that all fits in so wonderfully link after link. That is how you get into confusion. Now fetch Ruth, and try to learn how to understand her."

She came just then, however, without being fetched, and as they were leaving the room, she turned suddenly, and bent down to her aunt on the sofa.

"Aunt Gracey, it is hard for you to come back to us all like this. You went only because you so wanted to get better, and to live your old life here; and it has all been no good."

"Ruthie, thank you," her aunt replied, putting all she meant into the word, for the girl's sympathy was sweet to her. She knew it had cost her an effort to

speaking ; and Ruth had exactly touched the right chord. The old life there looked wonderfully attractive these first few days, and it was no easy matter for one so energetic to feel that all in which she had been accustomed to take so leading a part must go on without her.

"I wonder I ever believed the doctors," she went on in her own bright tone, "and went away thinking I should ever get better more quickly anywhere else than here. I shall not leave Bransdale again, so Ruthie and you must come and read to me sometimes, and be my hands and feet about the village."

"May I?" Ruth said gratefully, and then paused a minute. "Harry told you all about it, auntie—how I would not go the other day. Did he tell you I was idle? Did he ask you to give me something to do?"

"Harry gave me no advice on the subject, Ruthie. But would that have made any difference? Would it have kept you away when I wanted you?"

"I know it is bad of me," she answered; "but all the time that you have been away I have done nothing, because when they brought it me I could not *want* to do it."

Aunt Gracey understood, and looking at the girl's flushed face turned from her, she said quietly, "It will all be uphill work so long as you take things second-hand like that. Any work we want to do must be done either for our own or for Christ's sake. If it is his work you mean that you have left undone,

was there cause enough for it? Harry and Emily may perhaps have been messengers to bring you work for him. You must look beyond the hand that puts it into yours, and think where it all really comes from. Would not remembering this make even *little* things worth doing?"

Ruth did not answer; she only bent to kiss her, and turned to join her brother.

They were silent for a long time, and then Harry said, "I found a text the other day which seemed to sum up what Aunt Gracey was sent into the world to do. Wherever she goes, she seems to have the power to 'undo the heavy burdens' of those around her; whilst we, for the most part, add to them by our unsympathetic carelessness."

Ruth assented; and then finding how silent he had been, Harry put aside his own thoughts, and roused himself to hear what she had been doing lately, and broke down the shadow of a barrier she had raised between them owing to his reproof about Mrs. Fraser.

He saw her brighten, and left her in her usual good spirits when he said good-bye at The Elms. He walked quickly homewards; and waiting for him was that little figure he had learned to expect, and whose question he now answered before it was put. And the feet that sped away were swifter this night than usual, for they carried the glad tidings—"Better."

Harry watched the retreating form, wondering

who he might be. It was only now and then he caught sight of the child's face, and it was of so ordinary a type it reminded him of no one. It was useless to try to detain him by a question, for he had not manners enough to stop and answer it. Then, again, the boy never questioned any other. Harry might be as late as he would, that lonely ragged little figure would unfailingly appear as he turned to mount the steps. Now that his anxiety about Philip was lessened, his curiosity concerning this daily visitor increased, and he determined to find out who he was, and to whom he carried his message so regularly.

CHAPTER XV.

INTO TEMPTATION.



FORTNIGHT passed, and the rich and the poor, who had been one in danger and one in sorrow and sympathy, had not crossed one another's path again in the common everyday life.

Philip's illness had kept Harry watching by him every hour he could spare; and now that he was better, his friend was more anxious than ever to be constantly with him.

Ruth's new resolutions had not yet been put into practice, and she had not been to see Mrs. Fraser.

So without a word of encouragement or sympathy, the sorrow-stricken mother, who had done herself and her family so great a wrong, had to begin life again with a heavy heart.

Even her little children seemed to look up at her with doubtful eyes when they came in. Her husband slunk in and out of the house, fearful of reproach for the deed he had done. Her neighbours shunned her; those that had been friendly were so no longer; and

being, as Fred said, "young," she felt her solitary position keenly. The temptation to go on in the path of misery she had entered was hard to combat. It looked so easy to drift along, and to leave remorse and feeling behind. She could not turn or think without the blank little Willie's death had made in her life and home coming back to her. What was she to do? Where was she to turn for a helping hand?

There was only one who did not change, but he was too young to do for her what she needed. Fred alone came in and out as usual, and sorrowed more than she knew over the change in her. It preyed upon his mind, till he felt he must do something to save her; and finding himself alone with her, plunged fearlessly into the subject one evening.

"Aunt Susan," he said, "do you want your little ones to grow up like Annie and Emma?"

She looked up surprised, and an involuntary hasty "No" dropped from her lips.

"It is mother that has made them what they are," he said steadily; "I can remember them very different."

"Fred, you are getting hard," she said; "there are enough without you to say unjust things of me."

"Whenever I see you now," he went on, "the day we stood here together comes back. You said, though such a little boy Willie liked it already; and they are learning to like it. People speak as though it was

the men and boys that did all the drinking. I wish some one would look after the women and girls a bit," he said earnestly.

"Charity begins at home," she replied a little spitefully. But he did not wince, and answered,—

"It is because I know it all so well that I speak. I don't earn much, but I do earn some, and I give all I can to mother; and each week she has drunk it all up—all that I have worked and slaved for through the week. Would you have treated Willie so? Do you want the little ones to grow up to feel as I do towards those they are meant to love? Aunt Susan, I thought perhaps he died, not only to save himself, but you and the children, and—"

"Fred, what makes you care?" she said, interrupting him. Her tone made him suddenly bring his eyes from the nowhere into which he was looking and fix them on her face.

"It is not because I'm good," he said. "I'm not, and I can't be; only I do hate some bad things, and it seems hard on little Willie not to hate what killed him."

"Fred," she said, "you are a good boy. But I think you had better talk to your uncle; he would be the better now for a little good advice."

She did not think of him harshly when he was gone, but she did not think of him much. Something in her seemed to have died, or to have been deadened. She had also lately been obliged to go out to work,

and in the different laundries at gentlemen's houses where she was employed there was always provided for her a large quantity of what, as Fred said, had killed little Willie. So she let herself drift, and refusing even the warning that her wilful, moody, but affectionate nephew held up to her, drifted alone "into temptation."

So Fred had done what Harry had suggested; done it bravely, and failed. And this had been his work whilst there was silence between him and his new friends, against whom in his heart there was slowly growing up a feeling of distrust.

Mr. Carden had promised to go and see his aunt, and had not been; he had promised to come and see him, and he had not even sent for him. It was useless to think more about him; he had probably forgotten, and it was foolish to care. Yet Fred *did* care, he wanted to see Harry; he wanted to hear his kind voice again; he wanted to speak to this one who understood him, and he wanted too to see Philip. He should like in some way to serve or thank this one that had risked his life for him. Whatever Fred wanted he always wanted intensely, and therefore his disappointment was intense too; and soon he began to entertain distrustful feelings towards Harry, and his heart was growing very hard towards all the world but Jack.

And meanwhile Jack was treading unknown paths, and finding new pleasures and new difficulties at every

turn. We have said that he had a passion for reading; and directly he came to Bransdale he found how many were the opportunities for satisfying it. He would linger near second-hand bookstalls, and gain glimpses into things of which he knew nothing. These were not his greatest attraction, however. The worst is the cheapest, and the salesman of penny sensational papers found a ready purchaser in Jack. Little by little the taste grew stronger, till on the different days when these serials came out he would be eager and restless to leave his work, and only satisfied when he had made his purchase and gone away by himself to read it. He would not own to himself the power these tales had over him, and yet more and more they filled his thoughts. Jack hated evil less, he thought more seldom of his home, and he was making himself popular with the workmen with whom he associated as one who could tell a good story. It was only natural he should have other companions besides Fred; the love they had for each other did not necessitate their limiting their acquaintance to each other; and in the daytime Jack walked and talked with other men and boys. All this time the two had been only learning to like each other better; and yet Fred was conscious of some change in his friend. Slowly, slowly all the influences for evil in those streets, and the absence of all influence for good, were working ruin. In all that busy town there was no one who knew that in its midst there was a lad being lost for want of a guiding hand.

Yes, he was being lost; but he was not to be lost. Night after night in the home which he had left a little figure knelt at his mother's knee and prayed that Jack might come back again; or if not, that he might be good wherever he should be. And though so many claimed his thoughts and prayers, Mr. Davis did not forget the one who had strayed from his charge. It was well for them that they knew little of the scenes that he daily witnessed or of the life that he lived.

Suddenly one evening Fred came upon his friend standing under a flaring gas-lamp, straining his eyes over the last trashy paper he had bought. He did not hear him; and Fred stood watching him, feeling with a sudden disappointment that the mystery was explained, and that he understood the cloud that had come over Jack's life and conversation of late. He stood and watched the expression varying on his face, and felt he had read the reason only too well; and then he thought, Should he walk away again? should he go back to his own life and leave Jack to live his? But now he could not think of life without him; and he knew too well the bright look of welcome on Jack's face, to think he cared any the less for him. So chasing away all such thoughts he took a few quick steps towards him, and by way of greeting gave Jack a familiar slap on his shoulder.

Thus suddenly surprised, Jack let an expression drop from his lips that Fred had never heard there

before, and he looked at him with a look as of one who has lost something.

Jack saw it, and muttered something about not knowing who it was, and it being rather a shame to take him unawares. He crushed the paper into his pocket, and turned to see what Fred was wanting. Fred was still looking at him; but then, instead of the bitter sarcastic words that had rushed through his heart, he gave him one of his rare sunny smiles.

No one could know Fred any time without being won by the bright expression peculiar to himself that occasionally swept over his countenance. It was like the sudden lifting of a storm-cloud, and lighted up his whole face for a minute. Fred often laughed, but it was rarely that he smiled; it was only, as Jack had already told him, when he was feeling good. Jack saw it now, and half reflected it upon his own face; but his voice was not free from all irritability as he asked,—

“What’s up?”

“O Jack,” he said, in a manner almost foreign to himself, “I feel as though you were a baby and I had to take care of you. You don’t know what’s what, and there’s no one to help you. Now, what is it you’ve got there?” and Fred made a dive at his pocket. But Jack clapped his hand down upon it and stood off.

“Now, what is it that you want?”

“I want you,” Fred answered; “and I want you to show me that.”

Jack pulled out the paper and half threw it at him, trying to feel he did not and would not care whether Fred approved or not. One quick glance showed Fred that he had guessed only too truly the style and tone of what so fascinated Jack ; and because he could never speak quietly upon anything about which he cared much, it was angrily now that he turned to him.

"Do you like such stuff?" he asked. And still stifling every feeling, Jack answered doggedly, "Yes;" and in the bitterness of his disappointment Fred burst out with,—

"Then you're not what I thought you were. You talked about right and wrong, and I thought you meant something by it; and now I suppose you read these filthy things, and then go and tell your mates all about them. I should like to know how much you spend a week on the likes of these?"

How much? Jack hardly knew, but one had been added to another; and because he must follow out every story he began, he now regularly took in twelve. He gave no answer, however, and Fred went on,—

"A whole heap, I expect. I know what boys and girls do too when once they begin that sort of thing. And you talk of saving your money and helping your mother, and make yourself out no end of a fine chap. But I tell you I shan't believe you any more. I suppose you'd like to tell that small boy Robbie all the

things you read, and you'd like your parson to know what you were up to?"

It is not in a boy's nature to hear such hard truths calmly, and Jack's face was getting flushed and angry, all the more so because these *were* truths, and Fred had touched the right chord in speaking of his home and Ringdown.

How was it that almost without knowing it he had become so changed; that good thoughts had gone far from him, and bad thoughts come so near? Still he was silent; and then a sudden thought came into Fred's heart, a thought that seemed to dry up all his tenderer feelings and made his tone hard and bitter:—

"Oh, now I see. I suppose it's Sam that puts you up to this. He's not much at reading, I know. I suppose he gets you to look them up, and then you go and tell them out to him and to his companions, when you spend your evenings with him."

This was indeed a cruel and an unjust shaft. Fortunately for Jack, and fortunately for Sam, the two had not met since that Saturday evening; so the one had not been drawn away into evil which, in his present frame of mind, he would have been powerless to resist, and the other had not seen a stain on the character that to him had seemed so pure and so transparent.

For a moment the friendship of the two boys trembled in a balance. It seemed as though from

that hour they might drift apart, and each go forward careless of the good or the evil that the other might do. But here came in the difference in the training of the two. Fred had made this effort to save Jack because from very pride he hated what was low, and because in that he loved this boy he could not bear to see him injuring himself by touching that which could not be touched without defiling. Down in the hard life that they live it is all that boys can do one for another. They have a very real and true sense of what are first steps into evil; and by this plain showing up of their faults one to the other, many a boy hinders another from being overcome by evil. He hinders him, it is true, but often only just for the time. The angry words over, one walks away feeling hurt, and the other miserable. He knows, as Jack did, that the wrong pointed out is a reality, and he wishes he did not forget; he wishes he did not swear, and laugh at what is wrong, and make bad companions, and go where he should not. He feels tired of himself, conscious of his badness; and then—why then he keeps away from this friend, and goes unhindered into temptation. It might have been so with these two lads; it almost was so. For a moment two hearts beat quick with anger, two flushed faces turned one from the other, hasty words trembled on two pair of lips.

But in that moment all the influences for good so often brought to bear upon him seemed to re-assert

themselves over Jack ; the wrong stood out as wrong, the danger as a reality. The sudden crowd of home memories brought tears a town boy would have been ashamed of to his eyes. Fred saw his lips tremble before he spoke, he saw trouble in his honest face, and his own anger died away as he listened to the calm, quiet, resolute voice :—

“You are wrong, Fred ; Sam knows nothing of this. But there you were right too, and I won’t read them no more. There goes the old thing,” he added, tearing it up. “Father did not like them neither, and I know it ain’t right.”

They were but few and rough words, but they were more than a sermon to Fred. He was held silent by them, and then turned back to the other point.

“Then you have not seen Sam again ?”

“No ; but I am going to.” Jack’s voice was firm and resolute still, and Fred felt that it was from no fear of his sarcastic words he had given in just before.

“Jack, he isn’t fit for you ; you don’t know how bad he is, and you will get a bad name if you go with him. Every one knows him ; and soon they’ll know you, and you will be dragged down.”

Jack understood. It was the old tale over again : evil *must* tarnish good ; it is no good hoping that good may drive out evil. He knew that Fred would hardly understand, yet he tried to put into words his feeling towards the young outcast.

"I know he's bad," he said, "and it is along of that I want to be his friend. There ain't nobody cares for him; there ain't nobody as would even employ him. He has no home, nor ever had one; and he doesn't know nothing about wrong or right or anything. However much he wanted to be better, I don't believe he could; he don't know how. I know he does not want to now, but some day he may have a sort of a feeling, and I should like to be friends with him then. If you had not helped me first coming here, I don't know what I might have been now; and I should like to do for some one else what you did for me. You see father taught me to think about these things, and now that I have not got him to talk them over to, perhaps I think all the more."

Jack's voice trembled again as he spoke. It was a long speech for the country lad, and came out mostly in little jerks. But Fred followed it, and he saw that Jack had not yet counted the cost of *all* that it would lead to, so he asked eagerly,—

"And you won't care, not if they think you are a friend of his, and the police get to know and watch you? Suppose,"—Fred did not know what prompted these unguarded words, and would have taken them back as soon as they were spoken,—“suppose at Ring-down they were to hear that you have the greatest blackguard in Bransdale for your friend?”

Jack's face flushed; he was hurt, terribly hurt with the thought. He knew only too well how

soon village gossip laid hold of such reports, and he felt the disgrace it would bring to his and to his father's name. Fred was saying apologetically, "There isn't any chance; don't bother over that," but Jack was facing it all, seeing what it would lead to, and seeing as well the hungry look in Sam's eyes, the half-bashful request, "Only let me come and see you sometimes," and he answered in a dry, constrained tone,—

"Folks will make mistakes sometimes. *I* should know the truth, and"—Jack hesitated, he had never said so much before—"God would know." But Fred was held silent, wondering why he should care for that; and when they parted, he went home with more respect mingling with his liking for Jack, and with the thought that he would watch him and see if he could keep honest and true in the midst of the life which he had to live.

Left alone, Jack felt hurt and troubled. Must every effort to do right cost him so much? And after all, was he sure it was right? He wanted some one to talk it all over to—some one to whom he could tell about Sam and Fred, and who would help him as he needed helping. A feeling of loneliness, and of it all being no good, broke over him as he sauntered slowly onwards.

Unobserved by him, a small figure was coming down the street, with his hands thrust into his ragged pockets, trotting along with a don't-care air. He

sped rapidly along as though quite indifferent to every one else and very contented with himself. His small black eyes were following Jack, however, and he nodded his head as he saw him turn down a road where comers and goers were few and far between. He stopped whistling, quickened his steps, and touched Jack's elbow.

Suddenly recalled to the present, Jack looked down, and the small boy's message vanished into an exclamation,—

"My, how solemn you do look! Guess you're the one though," he continued, surveying him critically. "Sam's waiting round the corner."

"Sam—waiting for whom, you young rascal?" Jack asked, putting down his hand good-naturedly on his shoulder.

"For you, I guess, or I shouldn't 'ave told yer," said the boy.

"Did he send you?" said Jack, looking keenly into the little, unknown face, and hardly liking message or messenger.

"Don't know as he did; 'specs I comed 'cause I wanted to," said the small man independently.

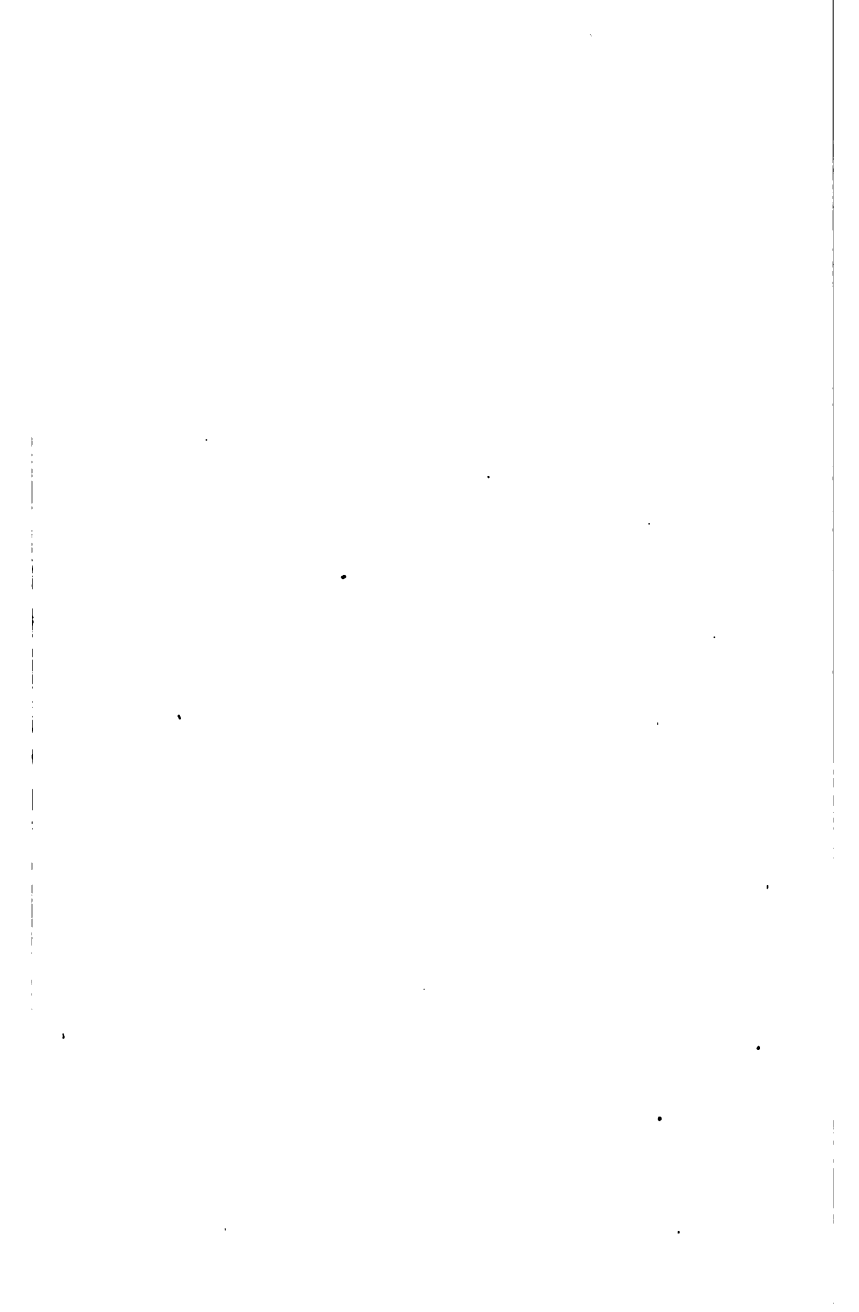
"What does he want me for, then?" asked Jack.

"Don't know as he does; thought maybe you wanted 'im!"

Jack's curiosity was sufficiently aroused to make him feel that he should like to know if Sam were there or not. So shaking the boy for his impudence,



"SAM'S WAITING ROUND THE CORNER."



he saw him move off, and turned the corner indicated. It led into a square dimly lighted, and up and down the pavement, with hasty, noiseless steps, Jack could see Sam pacing restlessly. He did not look as though waiting for any one, and Jack half thought he would go away without making his presence known. Then he noted how pale and haggard and uncared-for the lad looked, and he walked down the square and greeted him.

Sam started violently, and cast a searching glance on Jack, as though to see if any of the dark secrets that he hid so carefully were known to him. Jack's face was open and unclouded, however; and before he had finished that short scrutiny, there was dawning in his eyes that hungry look that Jack had seen before.

"What are you here for? You had ought to be abed," were his somewhat ungracious words of greeting.

"You've never been to see me all this while," Jack answered cheerfully.

"I've seed yer lots of times, so 'tain't nothing so partic'lar wonderful," replied Sam. "Don't wish to intrude myself upon no one, specially when they're halways along o' their most partic'lar friend."

"Oh, that's it," thought Jack, "I'm in for it both ways," and he wished himself anywhere but where he was so unwelcome. He tried not to mind, however, and up and down the square he strolled with Sam, till the stony tone died out of his voice.

Sam turned from one subject to another, just to see what this strange, thoughtful lad would say; and by-and-by he slipped his arm in Jack's, and a small face that kept peering unseen round the corner brimmed over with suppressed merriment, and a small figure retired to turn a somersault for joy. All his rough sad life Sam had never had a companion such as this, and yet, almost without effort, his words were free from coarse expressions as he walked and talked with Jack.

"S'pose Fraser's pretty cut up about that young cousin of 'is?" he said carelessly.

And Jack answered warmly, "Yes; he cared for him as though he'd been his brother."

The sudden change in Jack's tone made Sam look down at him questioningly, and ask, "You've got a brother, then?"

And Jack lifted the veil that hid his past from this friendless lad, and drew, in rough, unfinished touches, the home and the life which he had left behind him. He told of things so sadly strange to Sam that it seemed to him Jack's world was another to the one he knew. The only mother he could remember was one whose fame was from the number of her convictions, and who at last had died in prison. His father was a drinking man, who had turned him out of doors before he was seven years old, and Sam had had to look out for himself since then. It is true he had his admirers, and to some of his companions he was

almost a hero ; but he knew he was admired only for his badness, extolled only for his daring. There was not one who would not go as gladly to see him into prison as they would to welcome him out. Perhaps in the heart of the little fellow who watched them so eagerly from the top of the square there lurked the warmest feeling that any one bore towards Sam ; but that hard little heart knew nothing of love.

Stephen Stone was the name of this child who was gliding in and out of the darkness with an anxious, puzzled expression on his strangely variable face. To Harry Carden, as he looked down on it night after night to answer the question concerning Philip, it looked an ordinary, commonplace face. To Sam, as he repeated the message, it would light up with a look of triumph and pride that made his black eyes shine and his dirty little cheeks flush and something strangely attractive sweep over his countenance. He tried to appear indifferent, and cultivated a sort of contempt for the joy this errand brought him ; but he gloated in private over the thought that there was a soft little spot in Sam's heart, and he alone in all the world knew of it. There were all sorts of powers and possibilities within this small form, of which Sam was daily becoming more conscious and daily availing himself more. And the child gloried in being singled out for an errand or chosen as an accomplice by the worst among the many bad in Bransdale. He enjoyed his wild dangerous life. He was happiest

when the centre of a group of those like whom he hoped to be some day, making them laugh with his droll recitation of some story, or hushing them to sudden silence by the pathos of some song. From one haunt to another he went, evening after evening, confident of a welcome, and yet doing so not only for the sake of the amusement he gave or the applause he won. There was something dearer to this child of eleven years than these; there was something now for which he would go through and attempt everything.

"Sam," said his small voice the first time they met,—“Sam, I'll do it, and anything more yer likes, only give me a drink.”

“That's my man,” Sam answered, and nodded admiringly as he saw the boy toss off a glass of spirits, and look eagerly for more.

Already it was to the public-house this little lad carried his joys and his disappointments, and he never had difficulty in earning with his sweet voice the deadly drink for which he craved so unnaturally. But to-night he was on a new errand, and a purpose quite foreign to his nature had made him seek for Jack and send him to Sam. The child knew only too well why Sam was pacing that lonely square; he knew of a plot that was to be carried out that night; he had heard whispers that others knew it too, and he wanted to save Sam the shame and the disgrace of being caught. He gloried in the daring

of his friend; he would have been the last to hold him back from any plot, however bad, where success could be insured. But Sam had not been in prison since the boy had known him well, and from the tarnish of failure he purposed to preserve his name.

Suddenly he started from his post of observation and hastily withdrew into the deep shadow of a house, where he was hidden, but could clearly see the two who trod the pavement close in front of him. He scanned their faces anxiously, eagerly, to see if his plan was proving a success. From Jack's frank, open, lovable face the sharp eyes passed to his companion's, and for the first time in his life he saw that Sam looked tired. There was an expression of weariness and unrest on his features, telling even to those young eyes of a troubled soul within. Stevie saw, half-understood, and whistled under his breath. "I declare he's a-turnin' reg'lar soft," he muttered to himself, and a half contemptuous smile hovered for a minute on his lips.

Sam and Jack were still talking of the home at Ringdown. It is true that to the young thief the occupations and pleasures of which Jack told sounded lifeless and monotonous. There was nothing in the things themselves to attract him; it was the atmosphere of love around it all, the family life, the home, that made Jack's words sound like distant music to him, and that brought a weary feeling to his heart and a weary look to his face. But directly he felt

himself giving way to such thoughts he roused himself to shake them off.

"I declare," he said in his rough way, "you give a fellow the blues like hanything. Come in and 'ave a glass, youngster, and then I'm off. I've got a 'pointment."

"Oh, don't go to-night," said Jack with a sudden earnestness—"not to-night."

Sam flashed a look at him to see if he had any glimmering of what that appointment was; but Jack's face told of no secret hidden there.

"Too late, youngster; I'm in for it now. Come along; there's none too much spare time."

But Jack held back.

"Now none of that," Sam added a little angrily. "Young Fraser ain't put *that* into yer yet. I sees yer a-goin' down to the Yew Tree with the men in yer dinner-hour, and I knows the pot-boy calls round your way more nor once a day."

Yes, it was true, and Jack was not ashamed of it. The village inn at home was the evening resort for them all, men and boys alike, and he had always drunk his ale or cider like the rest. He knew he had taken more since he came to Bransdale, but that was only because those he was with took more. He had tasted spirits too, and he did not altogether dislike them. Sam pushed the door that swung backwards and forwards so easily, and went in, Jack following half afraid. It was almost closing-time. The place

was crowded,—crowded now with those who are always the last to go, those to whom what they get there is the dearest thing on earth. Into this whirlpool of danger the country lad followed his friend. There were no other doors open to them, no other sheltering rooms where they might turn their wearied feet.

The shades of night had crept down the hills and had closed over the village of Ringdown. But up and down the street there was many a light burning in the cottage windows. There had been a treat for the children that evening, and the games had been prolonged so late that it was only as midnight was drawing near that the tired little ones stopped to tell of the pleasures they had had and declared themselves ready for bed.

Down by his mother's knee knelt white-robed Robbie, slowly lisping his evening prayer.

"‘And lead us not into temptation,’" he said; and then, without thought of irreverence, lifted his eyes to his mother's face—"Does ‘us’ mean Jack too, mother?"

"Yes, dear," she answered, stroking back the stray curls from his forehead.

"But Jack's so far away, mother."

"He is not far from God, Robbie. He knows where he is just at this very moment."

The rosy face went down into the chubby hands

again, his child-faith strong enough to throw aside the momentary doubt,—

“But deliver us from evil: for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”

Sam pushed his way through to the bar, nodding familiarly to one or two whom he knew. He called for two glasses of spirits by a name Jack could not recognize. He pushed one towards him, and moving away a pace or two carelessly drank the other.

But Jack was looking round on that scene so fearfully familiar to Sam, so terribly strange to him. There were little boys reaching up on tip-toe to push their pennies across the bar and seize the glass the love of which was the only legacy their wretched parents had left them. There were men flinging all that represented their health and strength to purchase what for them would soon prove death. There were women parting with their womanliness for that which “taketh away the heart.” Jack looked round,—looked first at Sam, who was eagerly drinking a second supply of what to him was so dear; then on to those men, who might have been brave and manly, those women, who might have been tender and strong; then on again to the thin ragged figures that from without were fixing hungry eyes on what they no longer possessed the means to purchase,—silent, eager watchers, like wild beasts longing for their food. Jack could see strained, blood-shot eyes fixed even on

the glass by his side. He felt as though there were eyes everywhere,—eyes watching him, searching him through and through, looking to see if he would touch that glass. Suddenly amongst them all he seemed to see Fred Fraser's eyes. Could it have been? did his face for a moment appear against that glass door and look in blank astonishment to see him there? The thought made the colour suddenly rush to Jack's face, and his hands trembled. Yet he could not be certain, though it seemed to him a minute after that some one outside in the street was whistling, in clear, steady notes, the tune of the chorus,—

“Steady, boys, steady,
We'll fight and we'll conquer again and again.”

He looked at the glass so near him: he wanted it—he wanted it just then to drive away this miserable feeling of shame, these loud accusing thoughts; yes, he knew he did. And soon he would want it like Sam; soon like those men and women round him, till at last like the owners of those terrible eyes. He put his hands into his pockets and turned his back to the bar. Thought after thought passed through his mind. For the second time that day he fought a battle and won it.

Then Sam noticed him.

“Hilloa!” he said; “don't yer like it, youngster?”

“I'm not thirsty, thank you,” said Jack; and Sam burst into a loud mocking laugh.

“As though any one ever took it 'cause o' that,” he said,

and then he tried to argue with him. It was seldom, when he had anything special on hand, that Sam allowed himself to enter a public-house at all. But to-night Jack's influence had again made him hate the work on which he was intent; and to nerve himself to it, and drown these feelings, he had taken as much as he dared. Thus it was that when he took from Jack the strong mixture he had put into his hands, he passed the boundary of self-control. Jack did not know what to do. Sam grew quarrelsome; he could not get him to come with him, and he did not wish to go and leave him. He began to be afraid, when through the door, with his hands in his pockets and his mouth screwed up for whistling, sauntered his small acquaintance of the earlier part of the evening.

"O my!" he exclaimed with well-feigned astonishment, pretending suddenly to see them; "so that's what you're up to, his it? Well, now, I didn't think as you was that sort. And so you've been and made poor old Sammie a bit queer in 'is 'ead. Pity that. And I'm partic'lar hengaged jist at this wery minute, and yet I s'pose as I must 'elp yer a bit."

"Oh, do," said Jack eagerly; "anywhere, only do get him away. I know he'll fight, or do something. Bring him to my place—anywhere—only get him out of this."

The boy's eyes gleamed. "Guess I never thought hanythink so good as that ud turn up," he said to himself; and then out loud to Jack, "Now, would yer

really? You see 'e 'as been good to you, and hit's only fair you should give 'im a good turn."

Jack suddenly felt rather doubtful as to what Sam had done for him that could be described as "good." But all this was spoken in a hurried aside, and the small boy turned to Sam with that authoritative air he loved to have occasion to assume. He touched his elbow, looked mysterious, and beckoned him outside.

"What, Stevie!" said Sam in stupid surprise; "is it time I should be up—"

Stevie signed silence, and drew him round a corner.

"I've comed half the way to tell yer we's jist put it hoff for an hour, and you is jist to keep yersel' quiet for that. 'Ere's some un as 'll take yer 'ome and keep yer hout o' the way till they are off the scent."

Face and lips were too accustomed to lie to shrink from a fearless look into the clouded eyes bent down upon them. It was not often Stevie cared to deceive Sam, but he succeeded to-day. A warning "hush—sh" met Sam when he tried to argue, and a small black hand was placed over his mouth with a familiarity this child alone might assume; the other small hand clasped itself round his wrist, and Stevie dragged his tall friend along, closely following Jack. The boy enjoyed it. There was a delightful sense of ownership in feeling himself the ruling spirit there; and he hurried Sam up the stairs of Jack's lodging, and on to his bed, without one feeling of pity for the ruin that all this meant.

"There, I guess he'll sleep there till nigh mornin'," said Stevie, surveying him complacently. "My though, what will you do?" he exclaimed, suddenly struck with the fact that there was no resting-place for Jack.

"Oh, I'll do on the hearth-rug," Jack answered; and then he looked down on the small ragged form by his side, asking, "And you?"

Into his voice came that gentle tone that had won its way into Sam's rough heart—a tone that said, "I care," and Stevie felt it and resented it.

"I takes care of myself," he said, suddenly assuming a look of stupidity beneath which he was accustomed to hide all feeling. Then with a sudden impulse he added, "Have you got anything to drink?" He did it half from design to banish Jack's pity, half because he was accustomed to get it in every house he frequented.

Jack shook his head; so the hands went into the ragged pockets again, and Stevie walked downstairs and out into the darkness alone.

Once there he sped away as swiftly as his legs could carry him. All anxiety might rest since Sam, his hero, was safe, and his heart beat high with excitement as he hurried along. Softly, softly through the darkness went the unshod feet, slowly and more slowly as he neared his destination, till he crouched against the wall of a corner shop and waited to see what would happen. Arms and knees drew closer

together as the policeman slowly went by ; and then, after a few minutes' pause, from hiding-places near at hand three forms crept stealthily out. There were delay and mismanagement because Sam was not there ; and when they had effected an entrance, and thought the silversmith's wealth their own, there were a sudden flashing of bull's-eyes, sudden sounds of a scuffle, the rattling of handcuffs, and out again into the darkness, with a strong guard all around them, the three young burglars were marched. Not one of them was more than nineteen years of age ; and the shame and anger on their faces were more from fear of the disrepute into which their failure would bring them with their comrades than from any other cause.

Hidden away, Stevie saw it all ; and then, by dint of dodging and running, he managed before he left them to gain a full view of these three young faces.

The police had heard that Sam was to be there, and they were disappointed that the one who had lately eluded them so successfully should have done so again. Stevie half read this in their faces, and, very contented with himself and his night's work, he conveyed his small self to a distant part of the town, and dreamt over again in troubled sleep the adventures of the night. He knew well he would be in request for many a night to tell of what he had witnessed, and he treasured each detail, already counting on all that this would bring him.

Jack meanwhile was keeping a lonely watch by Sam's side. The whole situation was so unnatural it kept him restless and wakeful. Fred's warning of one danger, Sam's attempt to lead him into another, a sense of evil all around, and a great loneliness in the battle against it, made him feel hopeless. He so wanted some friend, some one who even cared just a little what became of him. So he thought on till, with his new resolutions very fresh in his mind, he knelt down by his only chair, and with a greater idea of all that it might mean, prayed,—

“‘Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.’”

Then he rolled himself up in an old overcoat, and by-and-by he slept. Sam was gone when again he opened his eyes. From the novelty of the position, he had roused himself as soon as his heavy sleep passed from him. It needed an effort to recall what lay behind this blank space in his existence; and as he recalled the circumstances, angry with himself, angry with Stevie, angry even with Jack, he sprang up. Then he saw Jack in his lowly position, and something akin to remorse swept through him. He bent down over him, and in his uneasy slumber heard him murmur his name. “Sam, don’t,” he said again and again in accents so pleading Sam longed to answer, “I won’t.” He lingered by his side some five minutes or more, letting himself love this pure-hearted boy, remembering with a secret joy how Jack had with-

stood the temptation of last night. Then he vowed again that he would keep away from him and never again let his shadow touch this, to him, stainless life. He threw another blanket over him with a woman's gentleness, then took a good-bye look, feeling that he was leaving for ever something too sacred for him to touch. It was *he* whom Jack had sought last night; it was for him he had not grudged to give up his rest. It was so strange, so new to have any one care to do such things for him. Sam felt he could not lose sight of him; and yet, as he had proved last night, he could not trust himself not to lead him wrong. Struggling up like a tender plant on very barren ground came the thought, Should he make himself worthy this friendship that he coveted? Why did he not go then? Why not move away stronger for the true and the right than ever before? Why linger yet, and in the further pause hear words that scattered to the winds these strange new thoughts?

"Fred, Fred," murmured Jack uneasily, "I did not; no, he shall not make me."

Out into the early darkness sped the lad, smitten with a fierce pang of jealousy, carrying in his heart a hate that longed for action.

"Steve," he said, suddenly meeting the boy—"Steve, how was it?"

"They was all catched," said the boy carelessly.

"And you knew?"

"Guess some one must keep their eyes open."

"Steve, did you do it all?" said Sam, not quite free from his better feelings.

"My, don't *you* get soft," said the child, at the same time brimming over with delight at having saved his friend; "come and 'ave a glass, and I'll tell yer hall about it. Guess I was there, weren't I jist? They did look blue. There was Jack Raven, young Cabbage, and Scraggs. 'Opes they're comfor'ble now."

The clocks struck five; public-house doors swung open with the punctuality for which they are famed, and the two went in.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FRIENDS.



THE weeks were passing by, and Philip Langton was regaining his strength with a rapidity that surprised all his friends. Since that Sunday evening when Harry had carried the news to his aunt and to Ruth that he was better, Philip had made steady progress. Sitting by him that afternoon, it was Harry who saw the first returning sign of interest in the outside world, the first intimation that he wished to speak, and he bent down to catch the faintly-whispered words,—

“I am better ; I am getting well.”

“We hope so,” Harry answered, realizing in that brief moment how intense had been his longing to hear that voice again. From the time when Philip left his side upon the river-bank, Harry seemed to have been parted from his friend by a valley of silence he had no power to bridge over. Day after day he had been so near and yet so far away from this more than brother to him. He had waited and watched for the first gleam of hope; and then it came in these

softly-whispered words. And as Harry answered, Philip added, "I am glad."

Since then, slowly but steadily he had continued to get better; and now he was so nearly well that plans for the future were a frequent matter of discussion, though, as Harry often observed, it was the others who talked of them and Philip who was silent. So silent was he that even Harry felt bound to avoid the subject, and he was almost glad to do so. There was no hiding the fact that this severe strain and these long weeks of prostration had added to the delicacy of Philip's constitution; and knowing his natural restlessness, understanding his character as no one else did, Harry shrank from the future that seemed awaiting him. Whatever it was right that he should do, Harry knew that Philip would look to him to help him to do it, and however hard, however distasteful it might appear, he must be ready to do so.

"For right is right, since God is God;
And right the day must win:
To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin,"

he would often say to himself.

Looking forward into this unknown future, however, more steadily than Harry dared do for him, seeing the possible difficulties awaiting him there, Philip had come back to life with the words on his lips, "I am glad." He had been down into a valley of which those around him knew nothing; he had been down into it alone; but he had come back at rest as to the

future. The life that in the prospect of losing it in the river looked so dear, that in the hour of returning to the consciousness that he must live seemed so hateful, was now to him real and earnest, and he longed to be in the midst of it again, making more of it than he had done before. So out of doubt and darkness he came back with a brave heart to face the possibility of a life of inactivity and perhaps suffering. He faced it with a manly determination to try to realize what lay before him, and then left it till the time should come to enter upon it.

Mr. Langton had long ago gone home again, and his sister had shortly followed him. They had tried to persuade Philip to go to the sea-side to gain the strength still needed to complete his recovery, but he had insisted upon being left with his friends, and had gone from Harry's lodgings to spend ten days at The Elms before returning to London. Harry went up there as usual one evening, to find him alone; and walking up and down the garden, Philip suddenly turned to a subject which had also been tacitly avoided between them.

After having learned from Harry that little Willie Fraser had not been saved, Philip had so persistently avoided the past that others had been compelled to do so too; but he spoke of it now of his own accord. "Have you done anything for that lad Fred Fraser?" he asked; "have you got him to go to your 'room'?" And Harry had to answer "No," and he

reproached himself as he did so. This boy had been twice thrown in his way; he had caught a glimpse of the sorrow of his heart. Fred had unconsciously unveiled some of the difficulties of his hard, loveless life. He had given him the opportunity to help him, and by not taking it he had let this friendless lad drift beyond his influence.

"And the little child's people—have you seen them?" Philip further questioned. "I do not know why, but I have thought a good deal about them all. That boy would have gone, I think, if I had not been in time. Is he a nice sort of fellow—worth helping, do you think, since I have dragged him back to life again?"

"Worth it? Yes; but how you will do it I cannot tell. He is clever, I should say, but terribly proud. and as close about himself and his home as possible. He is not ordinary;" and then Harry told of his former interview with Fred.

"I should like to see him," Philip said; "it is something a little out of the common to have saved any one's life. I should like to know if it was worth it, and why. I should like to watch him."

"Don't expect too much," Harry answered. "It mostly ends in disappointment; only you have better material to deal with than often comes in my way. If any one wants his faith and patience tried, he had better try to help boys. You cannot see very much of them without caring for them. There is such an utter want of jealousy and littleness about

them ; they are often so affectionate, so light-hearted, often so earnest and true ; they respond so readily to your efforts,—and then suddenly disappoint you altogether. They yield to another influence as easily as they did to yours. You see them growing hard and low and coarse, and seem unable to touch them anywhere.”

“I don’t understand you, Harry, and I never shall. Why you do it all, and when, I cannot think ; and what the ‘all’ is, I believe no one knows. I hardly ever hear you discoursing on the masses. You are hardly ever missing when you are wanted. You have heaps of friends, and they never grumble, as friends are only too ready to do if you take to an out-of-the-way philanthropy. I am not complimenting you ; it is simple curiosity. You seem to satisfy every one else and satisfy yourself. Just tell me how you do it.”

“Does it look so to you ?” Harry said a little sadly, for Philip’s words brought back to his mind some of the things he *had* lost. “But you are exaggerating. I do not do much. How I began I can hardly tell. I was drawn down among the people. I learned to care for them, and I learned to believe in them. The more I knew, the more heart-sick I grew over the wasted lives, the wasted talents, and wasted powers. I tried being a friend to some who came within my reach, and it seemed what they needed : to find some one to believe in seemed the first stepping-

stone towards belief in God. It was a foolish and unlikely thing for a young man to do, was it not? It is right for the clergy. They may work themselves to death, and we stand by and applaud. It is right for ladies. But we men, we must keep outside, and go no further than committees and subscriptions. I had had enough of that, so I chose to go down amongst them and try to understand. I believe in these men having a position and an individuality as much as we have, and in no one possessing the right to intrude himself unasked into their houses or mix himself up uninvited with their affairs. It was with that feeling I went down amongst them; and to you, Philip, I may say it has answered in many ways. Rough they are without doubt, but never rude when sober. I respect them and they me. But being away from it all lately has made me feel out of heart. You were wrong, Philip, in thinking I satisfied every one. I could not exactly tell you, and you would hardly understand, the shadow that has come between me and some of those for whose friendship I cared. They let me know they think I am absorbed. I need not tell you I am not. If there is one mistake people make in these days of philanthropy, it is in thinking that the only ground upon which to work is in a lower grade of society than their own. I believe in love including an earnest desire to help, and love to all men includes your friend as well as your neighbour. It all seems so false and so untrue

when you may only sometimes be yourself and under certain circumstances. I hold with being the *same* friend to rich and poor; and every one seems to combine to make that hard and unnecessary."

"I thought that was where you had succeeded. Some one told me that a little while ago you sat a whole night holding in your arms a little ragged boy who loved you for your friendship to him, and who entered the dark valley fearlessly because his hand was clasped in yours, and your voice was speaking words to help him. And some one else told me that when the vicar's son would go to Cannes in the hope of getting better there, you left everything and took your summer holiday in the winter and cared for him till he died. Are you not looking on the dark side? It is humiliating to be told that mental depths and agonies have physical causes. But you have been so much with me, you have given up your spare time so entirely to nursing and caring for me. You have had kind-hearted but foolishly fussy people to pacify, and an unaccountable amount of anxiety to bear yourself. These cannot be heaped up one on the other without result. All through the time I would not rouse myself you were the only one who understood me well enough to be patient, and yet so firm and strong; and through this long time of getting well, the endless worries you have saved me have come very heavily on you. I know you care for me enough for there to have been some pleasure

in it all; but there must have been much self-denial and giving up of other things. And you are tired out."

Harry shrugged his shoulders slightly, and kept clear of all reference to himself in answering,—

"I know it is a gloomy view, but it is a true one—the human one.

'Our love for Thee makes not this love less strong.'

I do not say what 'this' may include. With some it may be their friends, time they had set apart for other pursuits, some life-aim. It may be anything; but I do say, whatever it is, you lose something, and on that very account you will be misunderstood. You may try to deceive yourself, and others may try to deceive you, that the loss is nothing; and it is awaking to know they are thus deceived that sends so many back again. Christ never deceived his followers when he was here. He spoke of loss, of a daily cross, of a weariness in well-doing; and I think we are ready to understand what the 'manifold more' is that those shall receive who leave anything great or small for his sake only when we have tasted of the other. Often we look round with hungry hearts, and wonder in our selfishness if life is all giving—lending and asking for nothing again; and for want of some one who will help, instead of saying it shows want of faith and is not right, such minds sink into an unhealthy, morbid state. Heartlessness and want of thought are the curses of this world. God hates

them; and till man hates them too, the hungry hearts around will be unsatisfied."

"You ought to have been a woman, I think, Harry," Philip answered. "As you said before, they are the ones for such thoughts and doings."

Harry drew up his tall form, but he did not smile as he answered,—

"You think all this womanish; you think it weak and unmanly. Most people do. But prove it to me,—prove in any way that you can that women may lead those noble, self-denying lives they do, that they who ought to be cared for should load themselves with such a burden of care for others, that they may give themselves up utterly and go about like angels doing good, and we may not without losing our manliness, especially if we are at all young. I trace the footsteps of some such women in and out of Bransdale streets, and I am ashamed that we men leave them unaided to do the work that they do there. They know the hideous every-day life of those courts and alleys, they face the squalor and misery and sin that meet them there, they carry love and sympathy where no one has carried them before. You were right, Philip: if I want to be anything noble in that way I ought to have been a woman; but as I cannot, I want to see if it is not possible to do it all and yet be a man."

"I did not mean to touch a sore point," Philip said, for Harry had answered warmly. "But just tell me

how, since I went away, you have begun all these different things. According to Frank, boys, girls, women, and men all manage to get something out of you. What made you think of it all?"

"So Frank has been spinning yarns, has he? He is my safety-valve, I always tell him. He and the 'little boy like me' are the small beginnings of everything definite that I do. Did he not tell you that part of it? I had cared and thought and wondered for a long time. But one day I had been dining at The Elms, and chose to walk home by a short cut through some of the worst slums. I was looking about—as you cannot help looking—at the sad, strange sights those streets offer at such a time, when out of a small gin-shop came this 'little boy like me,' as we generally call him now. There was an indescribable likeness between him and Frank that arrested me immediately. He had the same tender, lovable face as our little lad, but eyes more large and sympathetic even than his. He stood there a moment under the glaring gas-lamp, hatless and shoeless. His ragged jacket and waistcoat were torn in many places, and his trousers ended in a fringe of rags above his ankles. There was something utterly helpless and woe-begone in his whole attitude and expression. The door swung again before I passed, and a woman and several youngsters came out. The former addressed some words I could not hear to my little friend, and he was about to

move away, when one of the boys said something in a jeering tone to him. In a moment the whole bearing of the child changed. He rushed at the young bully like one possessed, and flung the whole of his small strength against him; he clung to him, tearing at and striking him with all his force, and then seized his bare arm between his teeth and wrung a cry of pain from his antagonist. Blow after blow was showered by a hard fist upon his head before I could interfere. As I laid my hand heavily on the boy's shoulder the little fellow suddenly loosed his vicious hold, and with a bleeding face and shoulder dropped senseless on the pavement. I knelt down to pick him up, and the boy took the opportunity of making off. I took the child in my arms, and looking round asked,—

“‘Whom does he belong to?’

“‘She,’ said several, pointing to the woman.

“I looked at her, and she cowed beneath my glance.

“‘Bring me water,’ I said.

“Some one fetched some spirits from the gin-shop. I threw them down in the dust, and the watchers who had gathered round us groaned. They brought me water then, and as I washed the blood from his face and shoulders I saw how fair and white was his skin. As I bathed his forehead and hands, with a little shudder he opened his eyes. I never saw so hopeless, so strangely wistful a look on any face.



THE FRIENDS.

There ain't no one else as
take me away.'
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do. I could not hope to keep him
in the place. I told the
to the child's home, and I carried
the little, low, dark cellar was empty
enough from the gas-lamp to show
the squalor of it. I sent the boy
on a box and talked to the child
so drowsy and tired that I took
again, and he fell asleep there
down on the pile of old sacks
and left him 'alone with the
could say. I felt as though I must
away; so I paced up and down the
went till I saw a woman with sad
approach and enter the door.
and waited till there was silence
away. I could not help thinking a
right to know such things, and
I a right to live in a town where
going on, and not to know them,—to
live apart, outside? I soon knew
I could help them if I chose; I could
There was no one to suffer but
them the story at The Elms the next

He fixed his glance on me, and I bent down and kissed the little lad. In a moment the colour mounted up into his cheeks, an unnatural depth of love lighted up his little face, he passed his arms round my neck, laid his tired head on my shoulder, and whispered,—

“‘Take me away; oh, do!’

“‘Is he your child?’ I asked, looking at the woman.

“‘No, he ain’t,’ she said. ‘I ain’t nothin’ to do with ’im; he’s a bad un.’

“‘That is a lie,’ I answered. ‘You had better not tell me another.’

“She looked sullen.

“‘I’ll tell yer what, gov’ner,’ said the communicative boy who always can be found in a crowd, ‘his mother don’t care nothin’ about ’im. She works down at the mills; and this un, she pays her so much to let her have the little un to sing, and she gets all the money and drink he earns. She beats ’im too, awful—don’t she?—and he’d a cut and run for it long ago, except along o’ his brother. This ’ere lady lets him have some coppers now and again, and he gives it all to his brother: little un’s mighty soft on ’im, and this ’ere row is all acause t’other chap called him a thief.’

“I felt the little face so near mine grow very hot, and the tired little form nerved itself to struggle from me.

“‘He ain’t, he ain’t! my Stevie ain’t no thief!

He's good to me, and there ain't no one else as is. Oh, I hates them all! take me away.'

"I did not know what to do. My wish, of course, was to carry him home; but I saw what that would entail on the child, for I could not hope to keep him, as he had near relations in the place. I told the boy to show me the way to the child's home, and I carried him there. The little, low, dark cellar was empty, and there was light enough from the gas-lamp to see the bareness, dirt, and squalor of it. I sent the boy away, and sat down on a box and talked to the child a little. He was so drowsy and tired that I took him into my arms again, and he fell asleep there. Then I laid him down on the pile of old sacks that formed his only bed, and left him 'alone with the angels,' as Frank would say. I felt as though I must guard him in some way; so I paced up and down the other side of the street till I saw a woman with sadly unsteady steps approach and enter the door. I crossed the road, and waited till there was silence, and then turned away. I could not help thinking as I did so, Had I a right to know such things, and yet do nothing? Had I a right to live in a town where such things were going on, and *not* to know them,—to grow content to live apart, outside? I soon knew I had not. I could help them if I chose; I could know if I would. There was no one to suffer but myself.

"When I told them the story at The Elms the next

morning, Frank grew wonderfully enthusiastic over 'the little boy like me,' and his pure, whole-hearted interest stirred me up to do even more than I had planned. From that time my 'room' began. It is not quite down amongst them, where they can watch one another in and out, but near enough for all to know about it."

"And your first little friend is your most constant attendant, I suppose?"

"No; strangely enough, he has never once been there. This unknown brother Stevie hovers in the distance like a dark shadow over his life. When I used to ask him to come, he would look frightened and confused; so I never do now. We often meet, but he seems afraid of being seen with me; so in Bransdale streets we never speak. He still lives his old life. Again and again I have tried to save him from it and from the drink, and I am trying still; but this same influence binds him to it, and Tommy and his sweet voice are still sold for money. He is a strange little fellow. On Sunday evening he often comes to church, and the only thing he ever asked me to give him was a hymn-book. He can read quite well, and I need only just to run over any tune once and he remembers it, and now he knows most of the words by heart. I know the child loves me next best in the world to his Stevie. He haunts me like a shadow sometimes when I am down in that part of the town. I can feel him stealing after me,

but dare not look round ; for I know he would dart away, and so something in which he must take pleasure be ended. He haunts me, too, with his large wistful eyes when I am sitting comfortably at home, and I get up and go out to see if I can find him. Poor, poor little lad ! I long to save him, and I cannot. That pitiful cry for help, ‘ Take me away ; oh, do ! ’ often rings in my ears ; and I know from other sin-stained hearts a speechless appeal goes up to Heaven against the lives they are forced to lead.”

Harry was silent, thinking of Tom, and wondering what he had been doing these long weeks he had not seen him.

Philip was silent too, and then said, “ But there can only be one small Tom. What of those others, those boys that are so insincere, those wholesale spirit-drinking women and wife-beating men ? They are the rule in these towns of ours ; and you must acknowledge they are very thankless, heartless creatures. What of your work amongst them ? ”

“ Hearts have little time to grow in the hurried scramble life has resolved itself into for them. But which is sadder—not to do a thing, or not to have the power ? I think the latter. To have lost all refinement and manliness, to be unable to sympathize or understand, to be dead to love, speaks of such a barren, empty life,—to me it is one of the saddest pictures. A whole world of misery is pent up in the way the children here say, ‘ Father ; ’ a whole world of

desolation in the hard heart that has deadened the childish natural outflow of affection. I know it is one of the things so universal now, it seems hopeless work to seek to alter it. But almost the first verse we learned is the last we shall ever come to the end of. We have no right to grow tired of ingratitude or weary of disappointment while it is written, 'God is love.' And then we do not work for the sake of results. I think I should give it all up if I felt it my duty, as some seem to do, to ferret out all that is going on in the minds of those men and women and boys—to take charge, as it were, of God's work as well as my own, to try to look into their hearts and see what he is doing there. The only rest in it all is to be able to feel that they are his people, and he cares. Our disappointments are not ours alone, and we are not left to ourselves in the search after lost ones. Only one little Tom may give his heart's best love to me, but there are thousands of lives as desolate as his which may need our sympathy as much."

"And you would not bid me do likewise?"

"No, certainly; your path in life and mine are far apart. You have your father and your home, and many, many claims upon you there. Do not think because mine sound less ordinary that they are more important duties. The utmost any of us can do is, whatever our hands find to do, to do it with our might."

"And mine is ordinary," Philip said, turning at last to the long-avoided subject. "I have been spoiled.

Father has spoiled me, letting me wander about at my own free-will; and my friends have spoiled me, making it all so pleasant. Thank you for never speaking of what I ought to do, and for answering the others when they have talked of it. You know how weak and undecided I always am about plans, and these last ten days the old wandering craze has come back again. The doctor suggested Australia, and you know how I have always said I would give anything to go there. But I silenced him, and made him acknowledge London and office-life would do me no harm now. Father has sacrificed himself for me, and I have only found out lately how much business affairs have been pressing upon him, and he would not take a partner because of me. He is getting old, and I think misses mother more, so I must go home next week to settle down and stay there. But speak of it as little as you can, please: they have a foolishly kind way of talking, as though I were to be pitied; the real truth being I have shirked duty too long, and hardly deserve a chance of being any good in the world now. You will help me even to do the 'ordinary.'"

"Nothing that makes life worth living can be that. I am glad you have decided. Mr. Langton has looked quite a different man since your return. People away from their homes can never quite know how they are missed; but I know your side as well as the other, and it has taken me nearly as long as you to feel this

is right. But I see it now, so I will defend you when the attack begins. Emily, I know, will resist your leaving her.—Here they come. What will she say to find you still out?”

“That is less pleasant still—this everlasting taking care; but it is so warm to-night, she will forgive.”

Harry turned to go when Philip was safely in the drawing-room, and received a parting injunction to find Fred and send him up.

“He may have been down into the depths too, and come back to hard duties,” Philip thought as he gave the message.

Harry left The Elms to walk down to his room in Bransdale. He had not been there for a long time; and though he had found others to do his work for him, he knew that too long an absence resulted in a loss of spirit and interest in all that went on there.

“I cannot bear to hear that odious word ‘mainspring’ applied to any person,” he would often say; “it cramps and narrows everything so. The only mainspring ought to be a strong spirit of love and union amongst us all, and a feeling that God is with us and guiding our efforts.”

But strive for this as he would, he was the centre of all that went on there, and he could not but know there was an air of life and interest about the place when he was there that another’s presence could not infuse.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BROTHERS.

“ STEVIE, Stevie! I didn't, I didn't.” Over and over again the words were sobbed out. Little Tom was crying, crying with all that intensity that comes from a child's wounded heart. But there was nobody to hear, and it was into the emptiness of a sad, busy world that he thus poured out his sorrow. Two great longings filled the child's soul at that moment—one to clear himself before his brother, to hear him unsay the bitter words that had fallen from his lips, and lift the terrible load of anxiety that he had laid upon him. “Then I shall steal, and go to prison; and then you can go your own way, and be one of Mr. Carden's good little boys, you young coward,” were the last words Stephen had spoken, dealing a blow to his younger brother that sent him reeling against a wall, from which he raised himself with a cut cheek and a bruised eye. The other was to feel again around him the strong arms that had once held him so securely, to be again near the object of his passionate, unchild-

like love, even if it were only to lie down at those feet and die there. Too weak to bear it, too tired to rise above it, the child threw himself down under his sorrow, crushed and spiritless. Long hours he lay close to a busy thoroughfare, yet hidden from it by the projecting wall of the passage that led from brightness to gloom, from the houses of the rich to the crowded courts of the poor. His bruised, wounded face was hidden in his hands, and it was only as twilight was turning into darkness that he was suddenly brought back to the consciousness of a busy world around him by the sound of firm, quick footsteps drawing near. He knew them—he would have known them anywhere, and his heart beat quickly as he almost yielded to a sudden impulse to follow them. But he dared not: he would not have those eyes rest upon his cut and wounded face; he could not tell this one friend a lie, and he would not say his Stevie had done it. They came near, so very near that he hardly ventured to lift his head and take one long look into that strong face that he trusted and loved so utterly. Then they went by—on, on, fainter and fainter, till even to Tom's quick ears they were lost among the many. Hope seemed to have come and gone, and there was a pain in Tom's heart that no child ought ever to feel and a weariness of life no child should know, as his head sank into his hands again, and he was alone.

Harry's heart was full of thought for this little

boy as unknowingly he passed so near to him, and an unlikely hope that he might find him in his room made him push the door eagerly. He was disappointed, but still there were many to welcome him. Rough faces lighted up with pleasure, hard expressions softened for a moment, as he made some pleasant remark; and then, without disturbing them, he walked down to the farther end of the room, where his own writing-table and chair occupied a small recess.

There were some twenty boys scattered about the room, some reading, some writing, some playing games, some talking, and altogether there was a good deal of noise. Voices were not lowered, and there was no feeling of constraint lingering about the place. The room was large, and the walls were adorned with pictures and curiosities. One half was carpeted, and here the chairs were grouped about round little tables, and it presented the appearance of a comfortable sitting-room. The other half was arranged more like a class-room, with benches and long deal tables. There were book-shelves all along the wall, and a blackboard and maps told of work as well as play. A door opening from this part led into a smaller room with a sloping roof, and here several boys were working with fret saws, and one or two attempting a little carving.

The instant Harry had entered the room his attention had been attracted by a small boy seated in a rocking-chair, reading a newspaper. He was a stranger

there, but Harry felt he had seen him before, and there was an undefinable likeness between him and some one else that kept Harry wondering of whom he reminded him. He was sitting away from the other boys, swinging himself backwards and forwards, as if unconscious of all around; and yet Harry soon became aware that those small keen eyes were following his every action.

Harry had hardly seated himself when a boy with a round, honest-looking face stood beside him with a request, "Please, sir, my Billy's here, and he wants to see them little critturs what runs sideways."

Harry looked kindly across at "my Billy," and handed the key of his cabinet to the young petitioner.

"Please, Mr. Carden, mother's ill, and father's broke out drinking." This time it was a pale, refined-looking lad.

"Mother ill, Jim? I am sorry. Draw that chair nearer, and tell me about it."

So Jim drew in a chair, Harry arranging so that the lad's back was to the others, and only he could hear.

No one looked up curiously; there was nothing to make the boy feel awkward; and he was no sooner gone than some one else was in his place with something else to say.

There was no one who ever listened to them like this friend did; no one who ever saw so exactly what they could and what they might do; no one who so

readily perceived the first little wish to do right, and encouraged it and strengthened it. So they came and unburdened themselves, and he lent himself to understand and help them ; and all the while he knew the stranger lad was watching intently.

Presently he rose and went across to where two shock heads were bent down over some little spider crabs, and the stories he told of them and of other of his curiosities soon drew a little group of listeners round him ; and drawn towards them, interested in spite of himself, the new-comer left his rocking-chair. Then as he watched the expression varying on his face, and suddenly catching his eye met an angry, resentful glance, and saw his countenance instantly settle into a stupid, listless expression, Harry recognized the boy who night after night had come to ask how Philip was. That was where he had met him before, but it still remained to find out of whom he so reminded him.

So the evening passed away, and this group of rough, wild lads were kept from harm and taught there were pleasures apart from wrong-doing and sin. To any casual observer they would have looked sadly unattractive, and Harry's work would have seemed hopeless. But the very fact that they came there three nights a week proved that a want in their lives was being supplied, and the influences to which they yielded themselves there could not fail to work some change in their lives.

"Boys, I want to speak to you." The cabinet had been closed, and the curiosities put away, when standing by the fire-place Harry spoke these words. Books were shut and games pushed aside during a moment's pause, and then Harry began,—

"I have been down to you very seldom lately; I have been nursing a friend who has been very ill, almost dying;" and then he told them all about the accident. "Every one was so kind. I do not know how we should have reached home, but for that tall strong boy who came by. I did not know him, and he did not know me, but directly he saw our difficulty he was at our side to help us, and then off again, with nothing but a 'Thank you' for all his trouble."

Harry suddenly became aware that the one for whom and to whom he hoped to speak that night must know and care for his unknown helper by the river-side, so with a quick change of plan he turned from what he had thought to say and dwelt upon this point.

"I cannot tell you exactly what he was like," he went on; "but just in the little I saw of his face, it looked so sad and unhappy I was sorry for him. He looked like a boy who was accustomed to do bad things, and think bad thoughts; and yet, without being asked, he was ready to do a kind and generous action. It made me feel glad; and I knew God looked down and saw it too, and he will give that boy other chances of doing right and kindly things. Now

some of you know lads like that, and some of you are like that yourselves; and instead of helping others and helping yourselves to do the right you *might* do, you lend all your help to the evil they and you *will* do. Now don't do it. I say it for your own sakes. Was that boy happier for what he had done when he turned away? I know he was. Would he have been so if instead of that, he had seen I was occupied, and taken the opportunity of picking my pocket? You know he would not."

So he talked on to them, using simple words and illustrations they could understand, and then he made them all look up at the text over the mantel-piece,—

"One is your Master, even Christ;
and all ye are brethren."

He spoke about the One Friend who had done all without being asked. He told them how he had chosen to be poor; how he had been a friend to those no others would befriend; how he had been mocked and called "a friend of publicans and sinners," and he had let the world say what it would, because he knew he was doing the work he came to do. Harry did not ask these lads to do impossibilities; he knew how shy, how sensitive they were, and he tried to leave in their minds that night the thought that even such a little thing as Sam had done was worth doing for the sake of Him who, though he was rich, for our sakes became poor. He had almost forgotten the stranger while speaking. Then remembering him as

he paused, he turned half expecting to see some softened expression on his face, but there was none; Stevie looked cold and hard. "We will sing, 'There is a green hill far away,'" Harry said, and sat down, playing a few soft chords on the piano. They had almost finished the first verse when he heard rising above the other voices clear musical notes that softened into wonderful sweetness as they came to the words—

"Oh dearly, dearly has He loved,
And we must love Him too."

The boy seemed lifted out of himself. Harry turned to look at him, and then by a sudden instinct he knew that here within his reach, close beside him, was the unknown shadow on Tommy's life, that this was his brother Stephen Stone. For the very enjoyment of watching and hearing him, Harry told the boys to choose another hymn, and they sang together,—

"At even, ere the sun was set."

He played for Stevie, and it seemed to him as though the boy sang for him, and the words gained new meaning and a new soothing power. There were other good voices among that group of singers, and they suffered themselves to be led by Stevie, till with a slow, prolonged amen they sealed the prayer,—

"And in Thy mercy heal us all."

Then the boys sat down, and Harry reached his

Bible to read the few verses with which they always closed their evenings.

He turned to the seventh of Acts and read the story of the first martyr, and he saw Stevie's face light up with interest at the sound of his name. Harry told in a few words of the noble, self-sacrificing life of this man; of how all friends left him in the hour of his greatest need; and then he saw Jesus, the one friend who would never fail. Then he read the short story of his death, and said no more, and they knelt for a minute in prayer. When they rose again Stevie was gone,—he had crept away noiselessly; and Harry looked at his empty seat disappointed, wondering what had brought him there, and why he had fled so suddenly.

"Do you know that boy, Jim?" he asked.

"Yes; I knows him. We calls him Bony Stevie, he's such a little un; but he's sharp."

"Where does he live?"

"I dunno,—nowheres for too long, I guess," said Jim significantly; and Harry asked no more, but his thoughts followed the boy out into the darkness, and he tried to think what new influence that evening might have brought into his life.

Meanwhile Stephen was trying to arrange all the new thoughts and ideas that were crowding through his mind. He had gone to that room with the deliberate intention of deceiving Harry and obtaining money from him. He had invented a plausible story;

and in spite of Sam's unaccountable liking for Mr. Carden, Stevie was gloating over the idea of imposing upon this one, who he considered was undermining his influence over Tom. But somehow, once in that room, it seemed so mean, and then so impossible, and when he spoke about Sam it seemed out of the question altogether. This very one whom he had determined to hate had spoken of this one little thing that Sam had done, and called it right. Every one spoke of Sam as bad, every one knew he was, but this stranger had seen in him something to call good; he had looked away from all the rest and seen this. His Sam, his hero, had done a good thing. Stevie felt no contempt for it; he felt a pleasure and pride that Sam's daring deeds never created. The rest that Harry had said was like vague shadows of something beyond him then. He knew he had spoken of some One who cared for them all and what they did more than he ever could do. Then there was that strange story about the man who had his name.

"And they stoned Stephen." Over and over again the words rang in his ears, and he felt half angry with those who put him to death, half glad that he had a Friend who drew near to him in his sufferings.

Thoughts such as these chased one another through his brain. And then the real cause of his going to the room at all came back upon him; the small hands clenched, he knit his brows, and stood still, looking

into the darkness. Money,—he must have money; he could not fail Sam and go back to him without the promised coins. So he kept away, and his dreams that night were a strange mixture of the new glimpse into a different life and the old. But he woke up with Tom's cry of pain ringing in his ear, and a moment's regret that he had struck the child, which he instantly stifled.

Tom meanwhile was also passing the night under new and exceptional circumstances. When at last he roused himself it was very late, and he wearily raised his bruised and aching limbs. Stevie's hand was not the only one that had struck him that day. The beginning of his troubles dated earlier than the afternoon. More than any other this child had missed Harry during the weeks he had been too occupied with Philip to visit that part of the town. "He is ill," thought the child; "but he will get better and come." But he did not. "He is dead!" was Tom's next thought,—“dead! and I shall never, never see him again.” And then the sensitive heart of the boy called back all the words of Harry he could remember, called back one day especially when Harry met him by the river and spoke to him so gently.

"Tommy, my lad," he began, "I have something to tell you. Last night as I came home I saw them turn you out of the public-house quite drunk. Is it too hard a thing for you to try just for a little not

to touch this drink? It is killing you, and I cannot bear to think what sort of a man you will be. Could you try, do you think?"

He little knew how Harry's heart ached for him as he put the question, how he felt the pain and the bitterness of the struggle; but he saw his face as he said,—

"I can't, Mr. Carden, I can't. They gives it me, and I must sing."

"Not if I help you? Would you try then?"

"No," answered Tommy, "you couldn't; you are not always there."

"Tom, do you say your prayers?"

"Yes, I does now, after they're all gone out."

"Then, Tommy, God is always with you. He could."

"But he wouldn't help me to sing those songs; they isn't good one bit," said Tom, puzzling Harry.

"Poor little man!" he answered; "I must think what we can do. But, Tom dear, it would be leaving off one bad thing to leave the drink alone." But the pitiful pleading eyes were again raised to his face.

"I can't," he said; "I can't."

And it was true. What could this little boy do against the evil all around him? He was not hard like Stevie, nor daring like Sam; he had none of Fred's independence or Jack's home training; he had no mother, no friends like the three brothers at The Elms.

But now he brought back these words, this one thing Harry had asked of him; and in his loyal, faithful little heart he purposed that he would try. So for two days he had held out against repeated offers, and then the storm had come.

He could not sing so well without it; he became tired, and shy, and nervous; the comic was not so comical, and the pathetic less sad. They tried to force him, but the child stood firm; and then when they abused him he burst into tears, and their evening's amusement was spoilt. So they took him to his mother, and gave her no money, saying he was no good; and the child trembled when he saw her angry glance, and felt the blows she showered on him. He crept away for the night, and woke in the morning only to meet Stevie's wrath. Tom would starve rather than send Stevie from him without some few coppers at least; but to-day he had empty pockets, and his brother had heard how it was. So, fearful of losing this source of income altogether, he had abused Tom right and left. He knew it was all Mr. Carden, and "he'd pay him out; Tom should see if he did not. He'd been setting him against him." Cruel, hasty words, and then a cruel, hasty blow, and Stevie was gone, and Tom left bewildered and wounded. What was right? How could he go on hurting Stevie so? How could he serve both these dear ones? This was still his thought as he rose from his lowly resting-place and crawled through the dark, silent streets.

On he went, not caring where, till he turned down a road where gas-lamps were few and far between. A wooden door, with many cracks that showed a faint light within, attracted him; and he crossed the road, and gently pushed against it. It opened noiselessly, and Tom crept into a large blacksmith's shed. The place looked weird and gloomy, and the darkness seemed the deeper in contrast to the one bright jet of gas at the far end. A solitary figure was standing by it, bending down over a yet unfinished piece of work. Tom crept away to where the darkness was deepest, and looked out curiously at all around him. Ceiling, walls, and floor seemed alike covered with iron and wire of every description; and the only noise that broke the stillness was an occasional movement from the smith.

Almost an hour passed. Tom's eyes were growing heavy, when suddenly the gas was extinguished, and he heard the man pass down the shop, close the door after him with a dreary bang, and lock it. Safe for the night, less frightened than in his own home, Tom fell asleep, pillowing his head on a pile of rusty chains.

Presently, however, he awoke again with a sudden sense that he was not alone, and he saw once more a light in the distance. This time it was only from the end of a candle, however. Raising himself, he saw a boy kneeling down by the side of the light, untying the corner of a handkerchief, and then he heard the soft chink of money being counted, and he caught the

softly-whispered words, "Seven, eight, eight and seven-pence; nine, nine and three." Then he went through it again, with the same result; and as the boy lifted his face to replace the money in his pocket, Tom saw it with wonder. He had concluded immediately he had discovered some young thief; but that bright, honest expression could belong to none of that class, and in the same unaccountable way as Fred and Sam, this little boy felt a sudden trust and liking for Jack Carter. He watched him carefully lift the candle and go up the ladder, and presently Tom rose and followed him. It led into a sort of loft, and at the far end he saw Jack placing two boxes side by side, and spreading matting over them. Then he blew out his candle, and through the darkness Tom heard softly-uttered words reaching him. Jack was saying his prayers, and the little boy wondered to hear Sam's name and Fred Fraser's. He waited till all was silent and Jack's regular breathing told that he was sleeping, and then he drew near. Tom had seen him throw his jacket carelessly on the floor, and, with the sight, temptation had come to the little boy. He picked it up, and felt for the pile of coins; but they were not in the pockets, and a solitary shilling was all he managed to extract. He dared not draw nearer to Jack, and crept down the ladder again half triumphant, half afraid. What would that shilling not do for him? Stevie would be his friend again, his mother would be pacified. Then

came the sudden thought, "What would Mr. Carden say? Would not God know?" "I think they would know it was all for Stevie," argued the boy to himself, "and I'd rather go to prison than see him go." So he clasped the coin in his hand, and determined to keep awake till the first ray of light should show him how to escape. But the tired eyes would close in spite of effort, and he was soon pillowing his head upon a heap of old iron, and for long hours lay in quiet, dreamless sleep.

Jack awoke almost with the first ray of light, and sprang up apprehensively, seeing his jacket lying as he knew he had not placed it the previous night. His hand sought his little store, and found it untouched in the breast-pocket of his waistcoat; then he looked for the stray shilling he had left for that day's meat and drink, and found it gone. He was bewildered. Who could have discovered his retreat? What thief had been bold enough to intrude there, and yet too fearful to rob him of his all? He felt angry as well as puzzled; and feeling angry, he went down the ladder, and there stood looking in wonder at the sight that met him. The early morning sunlight was streaming in through the window and the many cracks in the wooden door. It was showing up every particle of dust in the black, dirty shed, and just where it shone the brightest it lighted on a little figure motionless in sleep. Jack drew near: the thick curling hair had fallen low on Tom's forehead,

but did not quite hide a cut just above the temple; the long eyelashes rested on pale, tear-stained cheeks, and here again there were marks of a cruel blow; the child-like, innocent-looking lips were parted as the boy breathed quietly.

Jack saw all this at a glance, and then his eyes fixed themselves on the small hand that was outstretched beside him. It had unclasped; but so little had the child moved, that the stolen shilling rested on the hardened little palm. Here, then, was the thief; here, with this pitiful, woe-begone face, and these scanty, tattered clothes. Jack's first impulse was to rouse him by a thorough shaking; but it passed, and the question came instead, "Why had he stolen? Why had such a little boy taken the thing that was not his?"

Jack stooped down and gently took back the shilling, and Tom opened his eyes wearily. Night was his only time for rest; why should he thus be hurried back into the hard struggle of another day? Then he saw Jack. A sort of angry fear lighted up his face, and he started as if to escape; but Jack's hand detained him.

"You young scamp!" he said, holding up the shilling. "What have you been stealing my money for?"

"Oh! it is for Stevie," pleaded Tom, losing fear for himself in the thought that hope of reconciling his brother was gone. "Let me have it; you can steal more easy any day."

The insinuation was not pleasant, and if he had been any other sort of boy Jack would have boxed his ears; but the startled look in Tom's beautiful eyes, and his fragile appearance, made this seem impossible, and Jack stood looking at him, wondering how best to punish, and Tom sat motionless looking at the shilling.

"How did you get here?" Jack asked.

"Oh! I comed. And I woked up and seed yer a-countin' of it; and then I comed after yer up that 'ere ladder, and I heard yer a-sayin' yer prayers, and hall about Sam and Fred, and I knowed yer wouldn't mind so very much, not like some as would beat me black and blue. And Stevie wants it so bad; least-ways I wanted to give it him."

"So Stevie, whoever he is, makes you steal?" questioned Jack.

"Oh no, he don't," said Tom eagerly, afraid harm might come to his brother. "I did it hall along o' mysel'. I can't sing no more now I don't drink, and they beats me, and I doesn't know where to go." He shook his ragged jacket from his shoulder as he spoke, and Jack looked down on purple bruises showing there. Yet he could not feel sure the boy was not deceiving: little boys less in size than Tom told tales as plausible in that busy town, and earned their living by it. So he said harshly, "Look here, youngster. I don't believe a word. You are a young thief, and you know it, and this is not the first time other folk's money has crossed your hands."

The colour mounted into Tom's cheeks, and his eyes brightened as he clenched his hands and said vehemently, "It ain't no lie, I tell yer. I ain't told none since Mr. Carden said as I should not; and I ain't a-goin' to drink neither now. And I might have tooked hall yer money and have gone, and you'd never have knowed nothin'."

Yes, he might; and this brought back the great difficulty to Jack's mind—that his secret hoard and his nightly resting-place were discovered, and there was no more security for him.

"What is your name?" he asked in answer to Tom's outburst. But the boy was hurt, and only said,—

"I shan't tell yer."

Jack always had a gentle manner with children, and Tom was fast making a place for himself in his favour, so it was gently he spoke to him,—

"Won't you? Well, I believe all you've said. I think I know Stevie, and I am sorry that he has made you steal. That money which you saw I have been saving a long time; it is to send to my mother, who is far away, and to my little brother. Can I trust you, little man, to keep this secret of mine, and not to tell Stevie or Sam or any one?"

The boy nodded, and a look of shame came over his pretty face. Jack was still looking at him, feeling as though he had been brought near to another of the

sad ruined lives around him, and he wanted to help him. Tom lifted his eyes and saw his expression.

"It's Tom," he blurted out; "I don't mind yer knowin'."

"Then, Tom," said Jack, "I shall give you this shilling for Stevie, because I am quite sure I can trust you. But mind you never steal again. Would not Mr. Carden be sorry?"

Would he not? Up before Tom's eyes rose the grave look in Harry's eyes he had dimly seen one of the many times when his strong hand had led the child's unsteady footsteps home. Yes, he would mind. And what was he to do?—hurt him by telling him, or keep it secret and deceive him?

"Take it back," he said slowly; "it was for Stevie, half of it, and I ain't had nothing to eat all yesterday. I'll go away to Lunnon; nobody won't think any more about me. And tell him I did leave off drinking, and I didn't take that 'ere shilling; and tell him it was along acause he cared for me."

The last words came out very slowly, and Jack watched the variable little face as they were spoken, and met the large eyes as they were raised to his with the old hopeless expression, and heard the question, "Will you?" A strange feeling towards the little boy sprang up in him, and he smiled a kind smile at him as he told him that only last night, he had stood outside Mr. Carden's room and heard his every word; and that it was braver to stay and show what he would

do than to run away and leave a message. Then he drew from Tom the story of his suffering life, and ended the conversation by replacing the shilling in his hand, and saying, "Then we are friends, Tommy, you and I, and you shall come and have breakfast with me."

To go out Jack had to show him his own private entrance by the broken window, and Tom walked along by his side wonderfully contented. The world that had seemed so dark and cruel looked brighter and kinder to-day. Jack saw him make a ravenous attack upon the bread and butter set before him, and when they parted watched him walk away, stilling the thought that lurked in his heart, making him wonder how bitterly he might have to regret that morning's work.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DOUBT.



TOM trotted along the streets in the early sunshine full of life and spirits. He was still stiff and bruised, it was true, but he was happy, and he whistled gaily as he looked about for Stevie. One small hand held the shilling very tightly in his pocket, and gave him a comfortable sense of unusual wealth; and his breakfast had given him an equally comfortable sense of warmth. He soon joined a group of little friends, small, ragged, and dirty as himself, in a game of marbles. He had plenty of such acquaintances about, and they were a merry circle, with Tom their merriest; for he had some of his brother's sharpness, and a certain quaintness that almost savoured of Stevie's wit. They were busy with their game when some one passing stopped to look at them. A shadow fell across the ring of marbles, and Tom, raising his eyes, saw Fred Fraser beside them. He knew him by sight, but since the evening that Fred had been turned back into the path of duty by the child's hymn sung

in the public-house he had not met the little boy.

"Now, then, you ain't so very thin we can see through you," said Tom.

Fred moved a little aside, but still stood watching them. Then the usual dispute arose: one among the group was accused of cheating, bad language fell from those little lips, and words soon turned to blows. Tom raised his hand to ward off a blow from a boy yet smaller than he, and as he did so the evil little eyes of the one he thus protected saw the shilling in his hand.

"Go it, Tommy, go it," he cried. "Bill will have you. Here, make a ring."

Tom's spirit was up, and he flew at his antagonist. The shilling he had thrust into his pocket was neatly taken out by the promoter of the fight, and he stole away while the two little boys were showering cruel blows at each other.

Fred watched a minute, and then he interfered. His hand was suddenly placed on Tom's upraised arm, and he drew him away and held him there, while the other boys showered abusive language upon him, and Tom struggled to be free. He smiled down scornfully at their remarks, boxed the ringleader's ears, and drew Tom away.

"You young fool, fighting other people's battles," he said. "Now, go along with you, and don't let me see you up to such things again."

But Tom was not listening ; he was searching his pockets, and with a wild cry of, "They have taken it, my shilling !" he darted back in search of the young offenders. Fred sped after him, but he soon lost sight of him, and he turned back with quick steps in order to reach his place in time to take down the shutters. He hated the work, he hated the man he served, and who was his inferior in every way, and he held himself aloof from him and from his associates in a way that was galling to them ; and yet Fred was too capable and too business-like for him to make this a reason for parting with him. So the lad stood apart, and it seemed as though his heart was growing very hard and his spirit very sour. The truth was he was disappointed and restless. Though he had steeled himself to live bravely the hard home life, though he had found a friend in Jack, and through Jack's influence new interests and occupations, he was unsatisfied and unsettled still. There were powers in him that nothing had ever yet called into action, talents of which he was ignorant, and yet which kept alive within him vague longings after things greater and nobler than ever came within his sphere. There were a wealth of affection lying unused and a manly gentleness that was seldom displayed. As they met and met again Jack saw but did not understand the hungry, discontented look that was becoming settled on Fred's face. Neither boy had ever mentioned the scene in the gin-palace.

Jack never knew whether it were really Fred's face he had seen at the door of the public-house, or only a fancy; he had never told of the night's lodging he had given Sam. And Fred had determined to let Jack speak first. He had not understood how, half an hour after that conversation he remembered so well, he should find Jack in such a place. He had expected the next time he saw him to find a different expression on his face, and a lower tone in his conversation. But Jack was the same, or, if possible, a little more satisfying and trustworthy.

So Fred watched him wonderingly, and Sam jealously; and it was hard for the country lad to be faithful to them both, hard to feel that because he would be a friend to the one he was losing and lessening the love of the other.

So Fred was often left alone, and he thought over it all,—thought sometimes till the old hate of everything burned fiercely in his heart, and life with all its grave sadness bewildered him.

Only one had drawn near him to whom he had felt willing to raise the veil that hid these thoughts and feelings from all around; only one voice had said, in expression though not in words, "I understand." Fred had listened to it, and felt that from it life might gain a fresh meaning, and those puzzling questions of why he was, what and where he was, be solved.

So he had watched and looked for Harry, till slowly he had let himself be disappointed and lose

faith in him. "If he had cared, he would have come," he said to himself, little knowing how constantly Philip still demanded his attention. "But those rich people they can talk, but they do not care enough to do." And then disappointment had turned into indifference, and indifference into contempt, till he was ready to treat Harry with the same coldness that he showed to all the world but Jack.

This morning Fred's thoughts had been turned into another channel by his adventure with Tom, and he was even softly whistling to himself as he finished dusting and stood leaning against the counter watching an early customer leisurely drinking his coffee. He was counting the change, when the door was pushed again, and one who had never crossed the threshold before stood waiting to be served. Between his early rising and the present hour Stevie had managed to obtain a copper or two, and at that time hunger was stronger than friendship, and thus they crossed the counter in exchange for coffee and bread and butter instead of finding their way into Sam's pocket. Fred knew Stevie well by sight, and had a sort of admiration for the quick, clever little fellow. The other customer soon walked off; and left alone, some words became necessary.

"Good this," said Stevie, blowing away at his coffee. "Make it yerself?"

"Yes," answered Fred shortly.

"Beg yer pardon," said Stevie. "'Tain't quite what you're used to, and yer doesn't like it, eh? Well, it looks rather comfortable here; 'tain't every one as has the chance. Does yer take much these melting mornings? And they trusts yer with the till and all! My! wish I had the chance."

Fred kept silent while these disjointed sentences came out between much blowing and sipping of the coffee on Stevie's part; and then, half to turn away his train of thought from what might be dangerous ground, he said,—

"Have you seen Tom this morning? He's been fighting like a young turkey-cock, and lost all his money, too, into the bargain. Poor little chap! it is not often he has any to lose."

Stevie's face lighted up, and he set down his cup on the counter with a bang that sent a good half of the contents flying over. "Money! The young rascal! and he told me only yesterday as he hadn't a ha'penny, and swore to it too. I'll pay him out, see if I don't. It's all that Mr. Carden; 'specs he gave it him, and told him as he wasn't to let me have it. Young liar!"

Stevie's young face assumed such an expression of hatred and malice that Fred felt he must do something to ward off the storm from innocent Tom.

"You're hard on that little chap, Bony," he said, thereby turning the torrent on himself.

"Hard on 'im! Little fool! what's he good for, I

should like to know? Here he won't sing now, 'cause Mr. Carden says he ain't to; and he goes sneaking into church a Sunday evenin's, and is all along a-pretendin' to be so pious. Pious! Ha! and they tells lies all the same, and keeps the tin to their precious selves; hymn-singing hypocrites all of them."

"Does he go to his room?" said Fred, detaining the boy, who had hastily despatched the remainder of his breakfast and was eager to be off.

"No, he don't. I caught him a-creepin' up there sly enough no sooner than it was opened, and didn't I give it him! He ain't dared try that again."

Up before Stevie's eyes rose the comfort and the prettiness of where he had been last night, and then, in contrast, the blinding sleet and bitter wind into which he had driven his little brother on the night he had named. But it did not make him sorry.

"It's Sam you want the money for?" Fred questioned next, and the cold contempt in his voice stung the already angry boy, and he turned towards Fred, his hard little face all alight with passion.

"Yes, it is; and he's better nor you nor anybody else. You think yourself mighty fine; but you ain't, I tells yer, and Sam's as good as you any day. He don't stick himself up, and he has friends as cares for 'im, what you haven't, and won't have neither any day. I know you thinks as you keeps young Carter all to yersel', but yer don't, I tell yer. Why, Sam he

walks about with him and sleeps in his room; he can have friends as well as you, and he'll keep 'em too. I knows you hates him, and I tell yer you're a fool, and good don't come to no one as Sam hates."

He had chosen his shafts well and aimed them truly. Fred smarted beneath these revelations, and Stevie saw it.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed; "I thought you'd like to know. It's a pity you should be a-deceivin' of yourself, and such a gen'leman, too, as you, and so particular. There ain't nobody as thinks much of yer exceptin' yerself."

The door banged, and Stevie was gone. Out into the street he sped, hot and excited with his passion, longing to find Tom and revenge himself on him. Turning a corner, however, he suddenly stopped,—his heart seemed to jump into his mouth and every atom of strength to go from him. He opened his lips to utter a cry, but no sound came; and, as though rooted to the ground, he stood staring at something that was coming towards him.

There was a crowd of laughing, jeering boys and men; two policemen were in the centre, and between them, struggling to free himself, Stevie caught sight of Sam's pale, haggard face. Yielding to a wild impulse he rushed towards them, broke through the crowd, and then saw that Sam was hopelessly drunk.

The policeman warded Stevie off with his arm; but Sam recognized him.

"Where's the money?" he asked,— "the money?" and he managed to lift his foot and kick the boy.

Stevie fell, and more than one hand was stretched out to him. "Leave him alone, Bony; he's only got what he deserves"—"It's a good thing for you he's gone."

Again Stevie pressed through them, but all he could do was to walk close behind him, and when he might go no further, ask, as the gates which parted them closed, "When will he come out again?"

Then he went away. His hero was degraded; those who had feared had had the chance of laughing at him. It was no great crime, no daring exploit that had brought the disgrace. He could have borne it better then. And then came the harder thoughts. It was really his fault; he had brought him no money, he had kept away from him the night before. No day so full of bitter thoughts and feelings had ever yet come into Stevie's life, and he went down to the river, and hung about the banks and wharfs all day where nobody could speak Sam's name to him. The bruise on his leg ached, but he was rather glad of the feeling; it made him quite sure that he had done the little he could to get near to Sam. There was no bitter self-reproaching, no tender, loving yearning of his heart after his friend as there had been in little Tom's for Harry. Yet Stevie was perhaps the more desolate of the two brothers as he wandered up and down the river bank.

And all that day the words Stevie had left behind him were rankling in Fred's mind. The ceaseless flow of customers made it impossible for him to think out their full meaning; but they lay like a weight on his heart, and a sore sense of having lost something took possession of him.

There came a lull in the business in the afternoon, and Fred carried his sad thoughts outside the door and stood for a few minutes looking carelessly at the passers-by and thinking of Jack. Presently, walking quickly down the shady side of the way, he saw a young lady and two little boys, and in the younger he recognized the donor of the flower from the cottage garden in old Bransdale. He watched them, and as they neared he saw Frank recognize him with a sudden smile.

"Aunt Ruth," he said in a whisper so loud that Fred heard every word, "it's the boy I gave the flower to, you know; not the nice one, but the one that I liked best, the one that will be a soldier."

Fred heard the concluding words with a quick start, and looked into the glowing little face, wondering what voice had whispered to him the secret thought that haunted him so continually. He raised his cap as Ruth turned towards him.

"My little nephew has spoken of you so often since he saw you in Bransdale, and he wishes to know your name and where you live."

Fred gave both, and Hugh and Frank exclaimed

simultaneously, "Why, it's you we're going to see. Wasn't it lucky we saw him!" And then Frank went on more confidentially, "We were coming before, not to see you, but the little boy's mother; only Aunt Ruth couldn't, and Uncle Harry *was* cross. Did you mind? Did any one come? You see Aunt Ruth doesn't like it like mother; she says she isn't—"

Fred stood silent, not wishing to answer bitterly, and yet Frank's words brought back the growing untidiness and disorder of his aunt's rooms, which was telling out to the world its own sad tale, and often made the boy wonder if it could have been prevented.

Ruth interfered to stop further confidences on Frank's part, and said, "We have a message for you from Mr. Carden. His friend Mr. Langton is better, and would like to see you. Will you come up to The Elms at eight to-night?"

Down over Fred's face dropped a half sarcastic, doubtful look as he answered.

"Mr. Langton is much better, we hope almost well now," Ruth continued.

If there had been the least shade of reproach in her tone Fred would have resented it. But though there was none, he felt she thought him ungrateful to show so little wish to see the stranger who had risked his life for him. He bit his lip with vexation, and hated to be so misunderstood. He gave her a

hearty "Thank you," however, as he lifted his cap again and saw them turn away, and then went back to his work.

It was Saturday, and by six o'clock Fred was walking home with his wages in his pocket. As he turned the corner he saw a thin figure passing quickly down the street. The shawl she had gathered round her fell back as she mounted the steps, and showed Fred a bottle under his mother's arm as she entered her home. His heart sickened, and then with a sudden resolution he followed her so quickly that she had no time to hide her recent purchase before he was beside her.

She looked half frightened, but pretended to be busy arranging different things on the shelves of a cupboard.

"It's pay-day," she said; "what have you got for me to-day?"

"Six shillings, as usual," he answered; and then laying his hand on the bottle—"Mother, you won't spend it on this. What's the good of my working at all, if it all goes to make us more miserable? It's hard on me, mother, and on yourself too."

She looked at him utterly surprised, and then began to cry. "Well, I never did! such a little drop as I take at my dinner and supper, to grudge me that. As though your six shillings paid for your keep, much less that I had any over for anything I might want. If *you* are going to turn against me, Fred, you'd

better be off. There are enough in the house already to quarrel over everything."

But Fred was not daunted; this plaintive, aggravating tone for once failed to irritate him.

"Mother, it used not to be so. Not long ago father used to stay at home, and the girls were not always gadding about, and I was glad enough to turn in for the evening. I can't stand it much longer. I shall do as you say—I shall go."

The voice that answered him was no longer plaintive, it was loud and quarrelsome. "Her own son her accuser—it was easy enough to find fault—it was the way now-a-days." And then she began to sob and rock herself to and fro. And Fred went. He had meant to have had a game of cricket, but he felt too out of heart and restless for that, so he turned towards the river. He threw himself down under a tree, near the very spot where he had bent over Willie's lifeless body, and slowly he reviewed the days and weeks since then. What had he found, and what had he lost? He had found an adviser in Harry Carden, and lost him, so far as losing trust is losing altogether; he had found a friend, and lost him, if it was true Jack was deceiving him; he had found an object in his home life—he had hoped, by trying to be patient, to help to keep peace there, and had lost it in the hardness of his mother's conduct; he had found an aim in the hope of influencing his aunt, and had lost it, finding her heart dead to his touch.

And what was left to him? Just now it seemed only the sense of loss—the dread of knowing for certain that Jack, whom he trusted and loved, Jack to whom he looked as the power for good in his life, had been untrue, unfaithful. What was the end of it all to be? why should he not go and leave it? Why not quit all this uncertainty, and make up his mind, once and for all, to do as Frank had said, and “be a soldier”? Foreign scenes and foreign lands, hardships perhaps, and stern discipline; but freedom from all that made life so cramped and miserable to him now was included. He looked down on himself, and tried to measure his length. He was growing tall and strong, and everything active was pleasant to him. He roused himself to plan out and picture this future more distinctly, and as he did so a familiar whistle broke upon his ear. Tramp, tramp came the steps along the tow-path on the other side, keeping time to the tune

“Steady, boys, steady.

We always are ready;

We’ll fight and we’ll conquer again and again.”

Was Jack thinking of him as he ran over and over the air with such a hearty vigour? Fred was hidden by grass and bushes, and he raised himself only enough to see the bright face of his friend. How contented and happy he looked, and yet so full of life! A water-rat sprang into the water with a sudden splash, breaking the stillness. Jack paused

and threw stone after stone at it as it hurried away. He did not continue his interrupted melody, but giving a hasty glance round, drew out his week's wages from his pocket, undid the corner of a red pocket-handkerchief, and tied the coins in with others that were there. And Fred watched, wondering why this secret hoard of which he had not heard. Jack's mood meanwhile had changed, and when he raised his face again, there was trouble and anxiety resting on it; and over the river Fred almost softly trilled the chorus that once had brought them together. But he felt it too late to reveal his secret watch; and he saw Jack stand moodily gazing into the water, his hands thrust into his pockets. Then the cloud seemed suddenly to lift. Jack threw off depressing thoughts, and continued his tramp by the river bank, and this time the air he whistled was that of the hymn he had heard sung last night, and the thought in his heart was of what Mr. Carden had said the previous evening, and he bent his steps to Mr. Carden's room.

So he passed from Fred's sight, but not from his thoughts. It was weeks now since this lad had come to Bransdale, and he still was fresh and different from the other boys; it was weeks since Fred had pointed out to him the danger of the style of reading he was taking to, and he knew since then Jack had steadily resisted that temptation. Temptation it certainly was, and Fred little knew the power that

the exciting pictures displayed in the many news-venders' shops exercised over him. He little knew the craving he constantly repressed for the excitement books could bring so easily within his reach. Still less did he know how this boy, whose pleasure was to please others, felt the cold sneer and the rough sarcasm when, again and again, he had to refuse to be the reader of some objectionable tale. Having done it so readily at first made it trebly hard to refuse now; and often, as the workmen sat grouped about at their dinner or tea, a large lump of cinder was thrown right into the mug Jack was about to raise to his lips, or coal-dust sprinkled over his bread and cheese. Again and again he lost his temper; now and then in his anger he would swear as the men around him swore all day. And then the struggle would seem so hard, and this lost ground so doubly difficult to win again. It would be far easier to do as others did. He knew, too, that Jack had given up the drink. Why and when he had not heard. He had laughingly asked one day, "Who has turned you teetotaler, Jack?" and received the brief answer, "You." Both their thoughts immediately went back to the same evening, and they turned the subject. He had watched him since, however, and seen he was really in earnest, and was using his influence to persuade others. He had even spoken a word or two to his master. Indeed, there was a silent sympathy growing up between him and the strange, morose

man he served. Fred thought of all this as Jack's whistle grew fainter and fainter in the distance, and pondered again, as he had often done, on the reason of it all.

He had once held Jack's little Bible in his hand, and had read, as Sam had, the text at the beginning; and he half wondered if it was anything there that made Jack's life something different to anything he could attain to. "He knows all about it, I suppose," thought Fred; "he's been brought up to it. And so—and so," said late distrustful thoughts coming back with a sudden power,—“and so he deceives you, and goes and lodges along with Sam, and never tells. He's regular deep; and it's all nonsense his talking about right.”

Then a clock struck somewhere and warned Fred that it was time to be moving. He rose and walked away. On the other side of the bush, with a look of triumph in his small black eyes, was Stephen Stone. He, too, had watched both Jack and Fred.

CHAPTER XIX.

BY THE WAY.

“E'S coming to-night, Uncle Philip! and what shall you say to him?”

Ruth and her little nephews had turned their steps towards Miss Gracey's cottage when they left Fred; and catching sight of Philip in the garden, Frank had bounded forward, all eager to be the first to tell how they had found Fred.

“I thought,” he continued a little more gravely,—“I thought he would have been *very* glad, but he wasn't. He looked just a little bit pleased to see us, but not afterwards.”

“So the young man was not very gracious?” Philip said, turning to Ruth, who had joined them.

“He was very respectful,” said Ruth slowly, “but he did not seem very pleased. I wonder what you will say to him, Philip?”

“That seems to strike both you and Frank as a difficulty.—Aunt Gracey, what shall I say to this formidable individual? Shall I send him round to you?”

"I think when two people have been in danger together, and both come out of it together, they stand so completely on a level, stepping out into life again, that there must be too much in common for any one to need to dictate what to say."

"I agree; but I am afraid the result will be silence on both sides."

"You are the elder, Philip, and from your training, your thoughts and feelings are finer and more possible of being expressed. The mistake you are likely to make is in thinking that you have taken the serious and this led the careless view of these events. Impressions may have passed from him sooner—hardened, perhaps, instead of softening him; but depend upon it his near escape has made him think as deeply as you. And remember that the little lost child was his relation; he has had sorrow as well as danger."

"You will frighten him, Aunt Gracey, and he won't know what to say at all," Ruth said.

"I do not want to do that, only to give a caution. We are so slow to credit others with the same hearts and souls as we ourselves possess. We are more ready to put thoughts into them than to discover and expand the often vague, indistinct feelings that are seeking expression already. It was what our Master did, I think: 'Whom say ye that I am?' 'What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?' 'Wilt thou be made whole?' He did not tell the people of their

need, but made them conscious of it, and drew out the longing of their hearts."

Ruth looked across at Philip, to see what he thought of this, and found that he was looking at her to see the same.

"I am not Harry," he answered, "and I cannot talk good."

"I did not ask you. Only treat this lad as you would like to be treated,—deal with him as Harry has dealt with you."

"I don't think Harry has 'dealt' at all," Philip answered, "or I should have hated the sight of him in my room. He was always strong and bright, something fresh and suggestive, and wonderfully good and unselfish. I could always say what I liked when he was there, and he was never out of patience with me. It does one good to let off steam sometimes; and poor old auntie's, 'O Philip! how can you say such things?' made me learn to keep silence when she was there. It is rather unjust to tell any one they should not think the things they do, especially when they are young. I must go though, it is getting late; and I will report to-morrow how we get on."

"And you won't tell him not to be a soldier?" said Frank, who had been listening to all this.

"No," answered Philip; "not if it would be right for him."

There was silence in the garden till his footsteps

died away in the distance, and then Miss Gracey asked,—

“Do you think him changed, Ruthie? You and he have met so seldom during these last few years, you would see more clearly than we if he has altered.”

“Not much; and, Aunt Gracey, I understand less than ever Harry’s feeling towards him. I used to watch his face when Philip was so ill. Of course he kept bright for Mr. Langton’s sake, but I really think his own sorrow and anxiety were greater almost than the old gentleman’s. I could understand his being very fond of Philip, but hardly such absolute devotion.”

“Nothing less would have made him bear with Philip as he has, or enabled him to make him what he is. He would have worn out anything less strong. Of course Harry never told you that he went off to America without even saying good-bye. Latterly he had made some other great friends, and spent months at the English lakes with them. He never went home, and hardly ever wrote. Harry used constantly to go down to see Mr. Langton, and did all he could to induce Philip to come back. Without him, I think at that time there would have been a lasting quarrel between father and son. Mr. Langton was tired of all his wandering, extravagant habits, and Philip was unreasonable. Then when at last he came home, and later became ill, the kind old man forgave and forgot

everything, and sent him off to America. He never wrote to tell Harry, only sent him a hasty line from Liverpool to say he was off; but I know all the time he was there Harry's letters never failed. I am sure that when he was ill, and came to his right mind and came home again, no word about the past marred their meeting; and if Philip has made any confessions, they are sacred, and no one will hear of them. Harry knows how to be a friend."

"It seems rather one-sided, and I think gives the wrong one the advantage. If people want your friendship, they must deserve it. I do not suppose Philip would have cared a straw if Harry had given him up when he was always with the Herveys. It is making oneself too cheap, I think."

"So the world says, Ruthie; but it is the real proof of being worth the name of friend. Philip did not want him then, but he does now; and when he was in America he wanted the sure feeling Harry would welcome him to make him come home. If he had lost him in those days, we should never have seen him in England again now; we should never have heard of him going back to London, as he now intends doing, and settling down to help his father."

"Yet Harry is really fond of him."

"Yes, very much so. It is no forced feeling. That would never have stood this long trial or have won the faith Philip places in him."

"I always think he is a little blind to Philip's faults," Ruth answered.

"He agrees with me that we should be loyal to our friends, and neither speak of their failings to others nor allow them to discuss them with us."

"He does most sincerely," said Harry's voice from behind. "Better we should be called blind than they untrue. But you are trespassing, Aunt Gracey. I no more approve of my friends being discussed behind my back than in my presence. Why this trotting forth of my ideas?"

"We were nearing your favourite topic—the difference between being and having a friend. But you are early."

"Yes; I asked Graham to finish for me. I told Ruthie I would come for her."

That was not the reason, and Miss Gracey knew it. She looked at him anxiously, but her failing eyesight kept her from seeing the blue pain marks under his eyes.

He turned the subject from himself at once, and sitting down in the chair Philip had vacated, said,—

"I have had a new illustration on that point to-night;" and then he told them of his first conversation with Jack Carter.

Every Saturday night he held a kind of free and easy for the boys at his room. They came in numbers, and the clever ones amongst them took a real pleasure in filling up the short programme with songs and

recitations. In spite of many strangers being there, Harry had soon signalled out Jack Carter. They watched each other pretty closely, and Harry saw by the way the boy watched his every movement that he wished to speak with him. The room was warm, the laughter and clapping incessant. Harry hardly knew how to bear it, his head was aching so terribly. He managed, however, to give the reading he had promised, and was just closing the book in the midst of all the applause the boys so loved to accord him, when one of his most faithful helpers appeared, and Harry gladly gave up his place to him. He saw Jack's look of disappointment as he reached down his hat, and as he passed down the room he laid his hand on the boy's shoulder, saying, "Can you spare time to walk a little way with me?"

Jack rose and followed him, and before they had gone many steps he found himself telling all about Tom. It was for that reason he had come, and he saw Harry's face grow very grave as he heard the tale. Jack did not know how dear to his heart this little child had become, or how great a grief it was to him that he should thus have yielded to the temptation to steal; but he saw a little of the shadow clear away as he asked, "Is there anything I can do, sir?"

They talked over plans, and gradually Jack's face grew brighter and brighter. He was not alone in the struggle any longer; he had found what he had been wanting ever since he came to Bransdale—some one

stronger, wiser, better, nobler than all he had hitherto met to be a friend to him. Feeling this, he turned abruptly to the subject of Fred; and Harry saw at once he was speaking of a friend—some one whose name he was almost afraid to mention for fear of being disloyal, and which he did mention in the hope of learning how to help.

"Could you bring him to the room?" Harry asked; and Jack's quick "Oh no," made him ask, "Why?"

"He would not go anywhere, where it seemed as though he went to be made good," Jack answered; and again Harry asked, "Why?"

"He don't believe in it," Jack replied, his face flushing as words he had often heard Fred speak came back to him. "He thinks folks say a lot and do very little."

"I understand," Harry answered; "but perhaps if he came once with you he would find it not so. Will you tell him so?"

But again Jack shook his head; and then, afraid of lowering Fred in Harry's opinion, went on, "But he is good his own way. He went home that day you met him, and there he stayed. His father's a lazy sort of chap, as don't trouble himself much about nothing. His mother drinks; and his sisters are that aggravating 't isn't many as would stand it. He gives them almost all his money and goes shabby, though he hates it; and rather than see the house dirty, he gives a turn to the house-work."

Often Jack had gone round and found Fred on his knees cleaning the narrow passage, or seen him when every one was out reduce the sitting-room to a more orderly condition than was usual. He knew so well the expression his face wore then. Once, when he knew him less, he had opened his lips to say, "Fred, it is awfully good of you to do all this ;" but the words had died away before that cold, forbidding look. Jack had to stand at the window and pretend he saw nothing till it was done. He did it for his mother's sake. Their house should never be pointed at as a witness to her intemperate habits. What disgrace he could he would save her. And she knew he did it,—knew, but never once had looked her boy in the face and said, "Thank you." Yet in a strange, unmotherly way she loved him, and the only thing that now and then would rouse her better self was the thought, "Fred cares." He was good his own way, Jack truly said, but it was a terribly hard and lonely way. Harry's heart was reproaching him again for not having made more effort to reach him; he understood all this better even than Jack. He managed to say some words to help him, but he saw that just then it was more comfort to the boy to talk to him, and that what he needed was to unburden his mind.

So from Fred they passed on to Sam. Harry told how Stevie had been at the room the previous night; Jack, how puzzled he was to know how to make a right use of his influence with Sam.

"Fred can't a-bear my going with him," Jack said; "and yet I only says I'd like to be to him what Fred was to me when I came here."

In a minute Harry was down, placing himself on the same level with this boy.

"Many of my friends dislike my coming here and being friends with any of you," he said. "We have to go beyond our friends in these things, and think what work God has chosen for us. I can see you want to help these boys to do right, and there may come a time when they will want you for the same thing."

Jack looked up a silent "Thank you."

"We can see so much that might be good and noble in them all turned to bad and evil. It seems written over them, 'Without God in the world,' and so very few of them want to be helped." He was speaking more to himself, and Jack looked up again, his voice was so sad. He wanted to do something to cheer him, so with an effort he said,—

"Please, sir, I think a lot of the boys what comes here are different. I see them about, and they do try; it gives them a lift like when some one cares for them."

"Thank you, Jack," Harry said, recognizing his motive. "It is a comfort to know that; you see them of course when I do not. After all, our desire to help them is nothing to the love of God that is seeking them. 'We have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid *on him* the iniquity of us all.'"

I shall think of these friends of yours; and you must come and see me again soon, and tell me about our little Tom."

Then they parted, Jack going off with a very contented heart. And Harry too was cheered by this conversation. Sometimes it seemed to him as though the people were willing enough to let him help them and others of their class, but that his efforts to make them help one another failed. The men were selfish, the women quarrelsome, the boys wild, and the girls frivolous. It was refreshing to find this lad all alone doing what he could for those around him; to see how he minded their wrong-doing, and yet loved with all the strong love of a boy friendship one who would share none of his feelings on the subject. Himself and his own affairs had been nowhere, and Harry had purposely not questioned him upon them that first night of meeting.

Ruth and Miss Gracey listened to what he told them of all this. Little Tom's name and his wrong-doing were not mentioned; it was Jack's difficult position between Fred and Sam that Harry dwelt upon.

"And you told him to go on being a friend to this Sam? It's a one-sided theory, Harry, and I do not agree with you on the subject; it may lose him the faith of the other—the one he really cares for."

"It may; but he will keep true, and a day may come when both may sorely need a friend to trust. Are you ready, Ruthie? it is late."

His voice had a tone of weariness in it, and as Ruth went off to fetch her hat, Miss Gracey said,—

“You have one of your bad headaches, Harry; why did you go to-night?”

“I had promised; and then you see I met this boy, so it was all right.”

But she was not satisfied, and as he helped her indoors with all his usual gentleness, she asked, “Will you come down to-morrow afternoon?”

He assented, and then walked home with his sister. It was with a sense of relief he finally entered his own room, and he threw himself down on the sofa, feeling glad another week was at an end.

He had not been there ten minutes, however, when a gentle knock at the door disturbed him.

“I’m real sorry, Mr. Carden,” said the good-natured landlady, herself appearing, “but there’s a girl downstairs, and nothing won’t send her away. I told her I saw by your face you had one of your bad heads, and she did ought to leave you alone; but it is late now, and she won’t go. What shall I do, sir?”

“Send her up, Mrs. Hall, please;” and Harry rose and stood by the mantel-piece, conquering the pain in his throbbing temples.

A minute after a girl stood on the door-mat. Her round, rosy face was flushed, and there were signs of tears in her bright eyes. She was nervously crushing the folds of her ragged dress in her hands, and she held back as Harry turned round to her.



NELLIE'S VISIT.

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"Nellie," he said gravely, "what brings you here so late? Have you forgotten?"

"'Deed I haven't, Mr. Carden," she burst out; "but I won't stand it no more, I won't. Father got drunk, as he always does on Saturdays, and mother came in quite tipsy from washing. I'd left the children just a minute to run down and buy some soap, and she came in and found them so; and she beat me, and she did that," said the girl, hastily pulling off a bandage from her arm and showing a cruel gash. "I always said, if ever she really touched me I'd go; and she's done it, and so have I; and what shall I do, Mr. Carden? I ain't fit for service. I met Lucy, and she wanted me to go along with her, and she tried to take me into the public there, and I shall meet her again maybe when I goes out. So I came here; and what am I to do?"

The girl was excited beyond reason. She looked almost pretty, her dark eyes all alive with passion; and Harry put aside the thought of his own aching head in the desire to save her. He bound up her wounded arm carefully, then took his hat again and went out with her. Perhaps that silent walk through silent streets did more to calm and help the girl than many words would have done. The angry, violent sobs had long given way to quiet tears, and her flushed face was paler, as they stopped at last before a tidy-looking house.

"You can have a night's lodging here, Nellie,"

Harry said, after a few words with the woman who answered the door. "You must promise me one thing, though."

"Anything," she said, looking up gratefully.

"You must not go out till I come for you to-morrow."

The promise was given a little reluctantly; but given, he knew it would be kept.

So he left her, and went slowly back again, and battled with the pain during the night, falling asleep in the early morning, and rising almost unrefreshed to go out to finish the work he had begun.

Nellie was just finishing the breakfast he had ordered for her when he arrived. She looked down at her ragged, untidy clothes as he told her he wished her to go out with him, and he felt she followed unwillingly as they neared the court where her parents lived.

"Are you taking me home, Mr. Carden?" she asked at last, making a stand.

"I am taking you home to say good-bye. You need not stay unless you wish to," he answered, lingering over the last words just a little.

He knew the girl, and she was young enough—only fifteen—to obey him without resistance.

They went up the narrow, creaking stairs together, up to the one room where the family lived. Harry opened the door without knocking, and saw the scene he knew so well would meet their eyes. In a distant

corner a man was lying on the floor, his working clothes all covered with mud, telling that it was only from the street he had dragged himself up to sleep off the deadly effects of last night's indulgence. Still seated in a chair, half supporting herself against the table, a woman was sleeping unnaturally heavily. Harry's eyes went from one to the other of these two. Nellie's passed by both directly. Seated on the bed, all twisted up in the clothes, was a little child hardly a year old. They had heard its wailing cry as they came up the stairs. It stopped at the sight of Nellie's form, and a smile came over its wan little face, and it stretched out two blue little arms towards her. Nellie sprang across and clasped the little thing to her.

"Did its Nellie leave it?" she said, hugging it to her and rocking herself to and fro; "and didn't nobody put him to bed, the beauty?"

The sound of her voice woke up another little sleeper.

"Nellie, Nellie," said a little boy, creeping out from under the clothes, "you've been gone such a long while. Mother said you'd never come back, and baby cried all the while."

She patted his little rough head, and looked at the other child, not yet awakened.

It was for this Harry had brought her home, and he knew no words of his could have made her duty so plain. He touched her arm, and said softly, "You must say good-bye now, Nellie."

She looked up at him, her bright eyes full of tears.

"Who'll give the children their breakfast?" she said. "Who'll dress baby and wash him? and who'll keep mother from this work?" and she bared the little boy's shoulder, showing blue bruises there. "Lily is too small. She could not clean up the room;—they do make it dirty," she went on, looking round at the sad disorder.

"But you said you could stand it no longer. Put baby down; and remember you won't see him again if you say good-bye now," he said kindly but firmly.

"Mr. Carden, I can't," she said under her breath. "I can stand it as well as they, poor little things! They seem to want me, don't they?" and she laughed a little hysterically.

Harry changed his tone and manner then; he knew so well what a hard beginning again this was for the naturally lively, bright-spirited girl.

"Yes, they do, Nellie," he answered. "Look at baby—how happy he looks! and Dick is quite sure now he will have some breakfast. They want you more than any one. Try again bravely, Nellie; I shall come in to-morrow to see how you are getting on. Try to find time to wash baby's pinafore clean by Tuesday, and bring him and Dick to Miss Gracey's garden on that day. They will enjoy an afternoon under the trees."

So he left her with a hope of something definite and near, and he spoke a few more words before he

left that Nellie treasured up, and she began to sing softly to herself as she tried bravely to do the hard work that waited for her.

He knew—yes, he knew how hard, how hopeless! And every day that week he looked in to cheer her up. That was one of the many little things coming constantly to him by the way,—little things calling for time and energy, and anxiety and thought, but showing how these people trusted him, and that they did turn to him unhesitatingly in days of difficulty and distress.

CHAPTER XX.

DOROTHY.



HARRY went straight from his boys' class that afternoon to fulfil his promise to his aunt. His headache had in measure left him, but still he was not feeling himself, and was looking forward with pleasure to a quiet hour before evening service. It was therefore with some disappointment that, on entering the cottage, he saw that Miss Gracey was not alone in the garden.

That figure reclining so easily and comfortably by the side of Miss Gracey's chair he knew could be none other than Philip's; but standing behind him, leaning up against a tree, looking very much at home with them both, was some one he had not seen before. He walked slowly across the lawn, looking at her. He saw a dark-brown dress and a brown hat; and as she suddenly lifted her head, he saw sunny-brown hair growing low on a broad forehead, and brown eyes looking straight at him from underneath. The others had not seen him, and Harry heard the low question with which she made Philip aware of his

presence—"Is this your friend, 'the man of the masses'?"

He knew then who it was, and did not need to hear her name, as Philip introduced him, to tell him she was his cousin Dorothy Dorian. He knew all about her. She was an orphan, and Philip's only cousin on his mother's side. She spent her time in visiting and living with her different relations; and Harry had often thought that Philip's school-boy devotion to her had ripened into something more than cousinly affection. Circumstances had always arisen to prevent his meeting this one whose name was so often on his friend's lips, and therefore it was a pleasant surprise to find himself at last in her presence. He soon learned of her unexpected appearance at The Elms the previous evening, and how Emily had insisted upon detaining her over Sunday; also how, since her arrival at the cottage, Miss Gracey had made her promise to spend some time with her before leaving Bransdale again. She had met the girl in London, and knew her well.

"What a meeting!" said Philip, suddenly interrupting the commonplaces that were passing. "No one knows, no one, how I've toiled and toiled for this; and now, without any arranging of mine, we suddenly find ourselves all together, with Aunt Gracey to preside over us. We ought to be very happy."

"Ought!—are not you?" Dorothy asked, looking down again on his handsome boyish face.

"I said we. I am a unit. It takes four quarters to make a whole, and if one is missing so is completeness."

Dorothy looked across at Harry. His thoughts had wandered somewhere, and he had not heard what they were saying. She saw the look of sadness on his face. Philip followed the direction of her eyes.

"You have made a good shot," he said, lowering his voice; "but this is a new phase. I always told you he was bright, and so he is. Something must be wrong somewhere."

"Perhaps it is losing you," Dorothy answered half sarcastically; and Philip's low laugh made Harry look up and meet the eyes that were watching him.

"A penny for your thoughts," Philip said; "and if you can't tell them, put them away for this afternoon. I want you without encumbrances these last hours here."

Harry smiled, and conversation soon grew brisk and general, till in some circuitous way it came round to Fred, and Miss Gracey asked how the dreaded interview had ended.

"It never came off. I was late, and he was gone when I reached The Elms," Philip said.

Dorothy saw Harry's quick movement, and heard a tone in his voice which made her sure he was repressing some strong feeling as he asked—

"Gone without a message?"

"Yes; Martha said he went at once when he heard I was out, and only said, 'Tell him I came.'"

"Who is this Fred?" Dorothy asked; "he spoiled all my plans yesterday. I meant to give this good-for-nothing boy such a surprise, and all the time he was welcoming me he was asking whether Fred were there or not."

"The man of the masses shall answer you," Philip said, and he leaned back again in his easy position, leaving Harry to tell what he chose concerning Fred.

He began a little abruptly, inclined to give a bare outline, but Dorothy would not allow it. She had heard too much of Harry not to have a considerable curiosity concerning him herself.

She managed to draw him out, managed to make him interested in spite of himself in what he was telling, and every detail was soon in her possession.

"And you really mind that Philip disappointed him last night?" she asked; "you really feel sorry?"

"I do indeed, Miss Dorian," he answered; "I mind as much and as long as if it were myself. I had counted very much on the result of this interview. He must have lost all faith in us by this time."

"Think of that, Philip," she said, turning to her cousin, whether in jest or in earnest Harry could not tell. "You have made Mr. Carden really sorry, and lost the young man his faith in human nature, so far as you may be taken as a representative."

"The one will forgive, the other forget," Philip answered.

"But neither will do both.—It is a bad thing to lose one's faith in one's fellow-creatures, Mr. Carden."

"Very," he answered; "but there are worse."

"Misplacing one's faith is worse," she answered, speaking rapidly. "Philip has told me much about you, and he tells me you are a painter. You paint these black masses white, and then believe in them. I think that is misplaced faith."

"Dolly, what inventions!—She has a wonderfully fertile brain, Harry, so only believe a certain percentage. And I have to bear the charge of being the starting-point of all her wildest theories. I won't interrupt again, only hoist a silent signal-board, saying, 'Beware.'"

"I do not mean for a minute he put it one half so clearly," she answered, "but those were my deductions. But I think strongly it leads to that in the end. If you did not believe in these people, you would not be disappointed."

"And who would be the better—they or I?" Harry asked dryly.

But Dorothy was not daunted. "Both," she answered. "It would not be worth their while to be hypocritical, nor yours to wear yourself out."

"But suppose I do not find them hypocrites,—suppose I find true men and women among these black masses?"

"But you don't—you can't," she answered vigor-

ously; "they only know better how to deceive. Have you never known yourself taken in?"

"Yes, often," he answered gravely.

"Then what do you do?"

"Begin again."

"And then when you find yourself deceived a second time?"

"Then I try to learn where I made a mistake, and begin again in a wiser and sometimes a more successful way."

"And if a third time they undo your work, and prove themselves unworthy and untrue?" she asked impatiently.

"Then I have to go right back to the beginning and try once more."

"Then when do you lose faith?" she said, looking straight at him.

"Never," he answered; and there was a pause.

Then she looked up again. "I don't believe you; you could not do it if you were once utterly taken in.—Philip, does he?—Mr. Carden, do you live up to this?"

"It was that that saved me," Philip replied in a low, earnest tone; while Harry at the same time answered, "No."

"Then you have only been talking theories," she said indignantly; "only bringing down unused, dusty ideas that you keep away on some shelf, to trot out on improving occasions. I think it too bad."

"Pardon me, Miss Dorian," Harry answered; "you are too hasty. I said I did not; I did not say I did not try. It is harder to be climbing upward, never attaining—harder than to walk along the level path on the summit."

The last words were spoken more to himself, but Dorothy answered them in softer tones,—

"Then why do it?"

"Why not?" he answered.

"I see no reason. Why should you burden yourself with all this? why try to make the false true and the black white? why pile up these endless agonies upon yourself? Life is dreary enough as it is, and each one's burden sufficiently heavy without picking up the burdens of those around you."

"Did you never sorrow for another's grief, Miss Dorian?"

"Oh yes," she answered, flushing; "but I always woke up in the morning resolved not to do it again. What good can it do? I hear bad news about some friend,—give up all my engagements for that day, sit at home and think about her, write to her, go to bed and cry half the night, wake up with a headache, and feel very cross all the next day. If I could *do* anything it would be different. So it is the same with lots of people I know. They hear of some poor man or woman having done wrong: it is no end of a trouble to them: the persons themselves care nothing about it. They think, and pray, and plan, and hope,

and wear themselves out, and it does not pay; now, does it?"

"May I ask you one question?" Harry said.
"What is sorrow?"

"Sorrow? It is," answered Dorothy eagerly, wishing to give one of her usual bright, brief definitions, then stopping, thinking a moment, and with a less confident air continuing, "it is—" and then she paused again.

"Perhaps you have given the best possible answer," Harry said, after waiting a minute: "*It is*. As I came here this evening I saw a little girl leaning her head upon her hands, crying as if her heart would break. I stopped, and tried to comfort her, and asked her what was the matter; but she only shook her head and turned her face away, while the tears came faster. Sorrow had laid its cold, shadowy hand upon that childish heart—sorrow, the same that you and I and all of us have felt and always shall feel. There is sorrow all this wide world over, and the only remedy placed in human hands is that of being sorry too. If we want to lighten a load, we must carry part."

Her face softened a little as he spoke, but her voice was the same as she asked,—

"Do you *want* to? Do you find out sorrow for the sake of lightening it? Do you bear with being deceived by the mean and the untrue for the sake of possible but improbable good you may do? Is this another theory, or is it something you carry into practice?"

"You are a very close questioner, Miss Dorian. But I do believe in it being every man's duty to turn aside sometimes from his own interests to those of others,—to stop a while and 'undo the heavy burdens;' and thinking this, so far as I can I do it."

"Do it as a mere matter of belief,—as part of a creed of your own drawing up?" she asked, with still a ring of impatience in her voice.

"No," he answered briefly, as though to close the conversation.

But she did not yield. "Then why?"

"If you insist upon a plain answer I will give it you, though you may not like it. Our text in church this morning supplies it: 'Love one another, as I have loved you.'"

"But that means—" she said, and broke off.

"It means only quantity to some. Because that love knows neither measure nor bound, so our love to our friends may be strong and deep and absorbing as we will, and yet it falls short of that standard. To some it is turned into a license to idolize."

"And to you?" she said, determined to make him speak out, and seeing Miss Gracey had fallen asleep and Philip was motionless, with his hat drawn over his eyes.

"We need only to ask how that love was shown to know the real meaning of this new command. Since it made the 'Son of God' a 'man of sorrows'—a

bearer of every one's sorrow and every one's sins—'as I have loved you' must point to love of the same sort."

"You do it all from an unnatural and forced love, then, towards those about whom, in an ordinary way, you would care nothing? I should have thought they would have seen through that,—*felt* it in some way."

"I think you understand me better than that, Miss Dorian. If you were at church this morning, perhaps the last line of the last hymn we sung may give you a clearer answer still. It always seems to me Aunt Gracey lives it out. Do you remember?"

"Yes," she answered; "'Loving for the love of Thee.' I must watch her. I am rather stupid at theories; I like practical demonstration."

There was a little pause, Harry wondering the reason for all this questioning. She spoke all through in such a practical, matter-of-fact way, not in the least as though she wanted to know, only to prove him wrong.

He looked up and met her eyes.

"Is that your motto too, Mr. Carden?"

"Yes," he answered; and then the tea-bell rang, and Miss Gracey woke with a start. Dorothy only said, "Thank you;" and Harry turned to help his aunt in-doors. Philip roused himself, looking most suspiciously wide awake. He lingered with Dorothy as she stayed to pick up the shawls.

"I don't think you can have described him very well, Philip," she said; "he is not like what I expected."

"Don't you like him, then?" he asked anxiously.

"He is very honest," she replied.

"Of course he is," Philip answered a little quickly.

"There is no 'of course' about it," she answered, laughing at his readiness to do battle for his friend; "very few people are."

"How do you mean, then? You certainly questioned him rather severely."

"Were you listening?—well, I don't mind. This is what I mean: if you insist upon an answer, he gives you a true one; most people tell lies then. But I think he is self-deceived."

"Self-deceived! and you have known him only half an hour! It is a blessing you are so invariably wrong in your judgments. Harry is as true as the day is long."

"True to others,—I can see that; but not always true to himself."

They went together to Bransdale Church after tea, meeting Ruth and two of her little nephews there. She would not let them join her in her seat at the far back, so they went forward, and thus she was the only one who again saw Fred Fraser enter. She did not see Jack come in some minutes after at another door; and neither boy was aware of the presence of his friend.

Very different feelings had drawn them both to that church. What Fred had lost the previous evening Jack had found. The one had gone to fulfil his appointment full of hope, and feeling again as though ready to do anything for the one who had saved his life. He had gone eager to thank Philip for what he had done. He was thinking of Willie as he trod the dusty road,—that little boy whose name now so seldom passed his lips, but whom he still loved with the old affection, and whose memory he still treasured carefully. Yet, in spite of these grateful, admiring feelings, he was in a sensitive, irritable mood as well; and when he reached The Elms, and found Philip out, it got the upper hand. It was only another example of the untrustworthiness of these rich people,—only another of the many injuries he supposed himself to have received at their hands. So he turned away with very unjust and uncharitable feelings filling his heart. “For ever, for ever!” he said to himself, as he closed the gate with a bang. “I will never look to you for anything again—never trust, never believe you.” And having cut himself off from one more good thing, he went out again into a life he was filling with loneliness.

He went straight back home. Annie stood on the doorstep dressed out in the most extravagant finery. She passed him without speaking, feeling his eyes pass over her disapprovingly, then she turned.

“Fred, could you lend me a shilling?”

He put his hand in his pocket. There were only two there, and he wanted them for some new collars. He hardly hesitated, but pulled out one and gave it to her, and spoiled the action by some contemptuous remark on her gay appearance.

Then he went up to his room and dragged out an old deal box. He turned out the contents, and then began to put them away more tidily, and to pack with them the few ornaments and treasures about the room. He hardly heard Jim's step on the stair, and he started as the boy's voice suddenly asked,—

“Fred, what *are* you doing?”

He did not show any discomposure, however, but went on leisurely putting one thing by another. Then he closed the box and locked it, scrawled in a large hand over the top, “Fred's,” pushed it away again—Jim still watching him—and then he turned to the boy.

“Putting away, that's what I am doing; and perhaps some day I shall put myself away too. I may not be here long, and then you'll have the room to yourself.”

“Going right away?” Jim asked, not displaying the pleasure at sole ownership which Fred anticipated.

“Yes; why shouldn't I?”

“O Fred,” he said, “don't! What should we do? There's none of us can't manage mother.”

“I have had enough of it,” he answered, and

swung himself downstairs, wondering why Jim should care. He had never taken much notice of the little fellow, and he little knew how the few kind words he gave were treasured and cared for. The boy's whole horizon seemed clouded, and he sat looking at that box with a heavy heart; then he went down too, tried to believe it could not be true, and went off for a stroll.

"I am going away, so I'll go there once again," was the thought that brought Fred to Bransdale Church, and he repressed the wish to have Jack with him; Stevie's cruel little hand had widened the gulf between them. He had not altered the feeling of the one towards the other, only stopped its expression, and raised the question, Was I mistaken?

Jack, on the other hand, went because he was happy,—because some one had stepped into his life again who could give it all a meaning. Some one had cared to hear about his difficulties and to make a clear way through them; the world again held a friend for him whom he could trust. So it was with a glad, satisfied feeling that he turned towards Old Bransdale as soon as the bells began to ring.

So for once the rich and the poor, whose paths had crossed and recrossed unknown to each other, knelt, and prayed, and sang, and listened together.

Fred saw a different clergyman from the one he had listened to before enter the pulpit; but strangely enough the text was taken from the same passage as

that which had formed the subject on the previous occasion, and Fred recognized the words as they were read:—

“And Jesus, beholding him, loved him, and said, One thing thou lackest,” etc.

The clergyman laid down his Bible, and then began to speak. It was something different from anything Fred had ever heard before; it was hardly preaching, more just speaking, and in words that showed he believed his hearers had hearts, believed they wanted to hear. Fred turned eagerly towards him with the sudden feeling perhaps he should get from him something he was wanting.

“Loved him,”—that was his real text. He gave a short sketch of those of whom it is said Christ loved them when on earth—his friends at Bethany, his faithful followers, “the disciple whom he loved,” and this eager, earnest stranger. He told the short story simply, drawing out the character of the young questioner: his affectionate eagerness—running and kneeling; his apparent willingness—“What shall I do?” his clear conscience looking back on a bright past and able to say, sincerely yet humbly, “Master, all these I have observed.” “And Jesus, beholding him, loved him,”—knowing the end before he spoke, seeing the choice he would make, seeing the idol that already filled his heart, knowing that he could not really trust him, “loved him.” Yet, loving him, he lifted the veil that hid his real heart-secret from

himself; showed him the thing still dearest to his soul; and saw him go away sad and grieved—saw him turn in bitter self-disappointment and wounded pride back to his great possessions. Lacking the will to take up the cross, he could not follow.

Then he took as his two points a disappointed life and a neglected love. Fred listened to every word, hardly conscious of the effect they were having on him, only gradually feeling as though the space he had always counted immeasurable between himself and religion of any sort was being bridged over. It was brought before him as a power *in* life, not something outside to be for ever groped after. If all that was being said was possible and true, it seemed as though life would be changed, and the purpose for which he had hungered so long be given.

He felt, when the sermon was over, as though he wanted to get away by himself and just think through all that he had heard. He was hurrying out with this feeling, when he suddenly found himself close beside the party from the cottage. He drew aside, not wishing that they should see him, and as they too lingered, speaking to some friends, Fred heard distinctly the remarks that fell from them.

"It was a treat to have Mr. Grey to-night."

"Do you think so? I am not fond of his style."

"I suppose we shall have him here altogether soon."

"It is supposed he will have the living when Mr. Duke dies; he certainly has an eye to it."

"The poor are very fond of him, I hear."

"Yes. He has taken care to make himself popular with them; he preaches in a popular style, you see. But it is always so much the same. For my part, I am tired of it already."

The speaker then turned towards Harry with some question, Fred could not hear what, neither did the answer reach him, but he saw that the conversation was turned another way, and a minute after they left the churchyard.

"Did he talk and criticise like that?" the boy wondered, and in spite of all his late feelings watched his tall, manly form disappear with an admiring gaze. Then he turned slowly homewards. Those careless words had completely altered his frame of mind. He felt again as though he had been deceived and his better feelings trespassed upon. That man to whom he had listened so earnestly was, after all, only preaching to make himself a favourite and gain a living. It was not, as he had thought, because he really loved the people; the very words in which he pleaded with them were adopted to please,—*"a popular style,"* they called it. What a fool he had been to be carried away! It was all as false and as hollow as everything else; and he drove away the remembrance of what he had heard, and stopped his ears to the words that every now and then came

back to him. So he went back disappointed again.

Just as he opened the door Jim flew out of the sitting-room, stumbled against him, and fell to the floor.

"What's the matter?" Fred asked, still holding the handle with one hand.

The boy lifted a flushed, terrified face to his. "Mother," he said hastily,—“mother, she—”

"Well, what?" he asked impatiently.

"I said I thought she were driving you away, and she—"

"Well?"

"She—she—oh, let me go, Fred!" and the boy snatched his arm from his grasp and darted away.

Mrs. Fraser was alone in the room Fred entered, evidently half-intoxicated and very angry. The only sign of disorder was that the kettle had fallen from the fire and the water was streaming about. He found a cloth and wiped it up, never speaking a word; while she moved restlessly about, evidently uncomfortable at his presence. He refilled the kettle, took up the newspaper, and settled himself in a chair. Mrs. Fraser continued her aimless wandering for a quarter of an hour, then threw herself into an arm-chair and fell asleep.

The silence between them had remained unbroken. It had long been too dark to read, but Fred had remained motionless, knowing his presence in some

degree influenced his mother, and, for certain, kept her from drinking more. Now he rose, threw aside the newspaper, and leaning on the mantel-piece stood looking at her. No one knew, and no one ever would know, all the efforts, great and small, that he had made to save her. No one knew that under his cold, proud air there still lived some of the old child-love for his parent. He felt it as he stood looking at her, but checked the feeling. What was the good? Neither that nor anything else touched her now, and no one minded it as he did: the girls were utterly hardened and indifferent; his father seemed to have sunk back again into his old selfish life, and to have given up all struggle against adverse circumstances.

As he stood looking and thinking, Mrs. Fraser moved in her chair, and something fell from her pocket. Fred stooped to pick it up, and as he did so the hot blood rushed angrily through his veins. It was a pawn-ticket. If he could have spoken, if he could have struck any one or anything, it would have been easier; but speechless, motionless, as this hateful thing dropped from his hands, he had to receive this terrible stroke to his pride. It was from disgrace he had always tried to save her, and now she had disgraced herself. The neighbours knew of it, probably; they had whispered about it among themselves. The man at the shop would know who she was. His mother,—his father's wife pawning her very clothes for drink! Should he wake her and question her

about it? Should he tell his father? Thought chased thought through his brain, and then by-and-by the resolve came. He would work overtime,—he would do anything, everything to scrape the money together; he would go and fetch back that shawl, and stand beside her and ask, "For my sake, mother, don't do it again."

Startled from his sad thoughts by the return of his sisters, he hastily picked up the hateful ticket and thrust it in his pocket. They had been for a boating expedition, and came in full of spirits. How it all jarred upon him of course they could not tell, and he left the room as they struck a light and sat down to discuss the doings of the day. He went up to his own attic, and instead of hastily getting to sleep as soon as possible, he went to the window, threw it open, and kneeling down on the floor, leaned his arms on the ledge and let the night air blow in upon him. He was filled with an infinite sorrow and an infinite longing; and almost powerless to rouse himself to think, he let wave after wave of feeling pass through his brain. And by-and-by, as once before, from out of this chaos Jack's figure stood out in bold relief, open-faced, open-hearted, loyal, loving. Should he trust him with this sorrow? Then there rose the ugly picture of that scene in the public-house; the ugly thought that he had slept with Sam. He would tell him, and it would be an endless weapon in the hands of Sam and his friends against him. No; he

might still have his companionship, but not his confidence.

A half groan, half sob startled him; but he shut the window slowly, then striking a light, turned to the corner where Jim slept. As he did so, he caught sight of a hand awkwardly bandaged in a pocket-handkerchief being hastily thrust under the clothes.

"What's the matter, Jim? Have you hurt your hand?" he asked.

The boy had borne as much as he could, and the tears streamed plentifully down his cheeks as he answered, "I didn't mean you to know. Mother pushed me away hasty like when I spoke up for you. I fell, and my arm went into the fire and knocked the kettle over, and it got burned and scalded a bit."

It was burned badly, Fred saw, and Jim cried more quietly as he felt his firm, gentle touch.

"It's best not to speak to her when she's like that, Jim; and you'd best let my affairs alone," he said.

"But, Fred," he said, "what would I do if you went? There'd never be any peace. It's hard enough at school the way the fellows talk."

"Do you fight them?" Fred asked.

"Yes," he answered, smiling; "and I lick them pretty well too."

Fred nodded approvingly, and having unwound and examined the wounded arm and hand, he went downstairs to fetch some oil, and carefully bandaged it again. Jim watched him, proud and happy; his

freckled face looked less plain than usual beneath its curly crown of sandy hair ; and as he tended him, Fred felt a new interest in the little boy. He professed great readiness for sleep when the operation was over. Fred heard his regular breathing soon after he had blown out the light, and he returned to his post at the window again. He was feeling wide awake himself, and too restless and perplexed for sleep.

So Sunday night closed down on careless speakers and earnest preachers, new friendships, new disappointments ; and as the last quarter chimed, and the day of rest passed away, it still left a boy on his knees looking out with keen gray eyes into the emptiness of space.

CHAPTER XXI.

"YE VISITED ME."

"E have said all we have to say, so let us talk of something else," were Philip's half-laughing words, as, feeling more sorry than he cared to show at leaving Bransdale, he joined Harry on the railway platform early on Monday morning. There was not much time even for commonplaces, however, and Philip was soon seated in the carriage, and Harry standing outside holding Roslyn by the collar.

"You will look after Dolly now and then when you have time, won't you? She pursued you rather mercilessly last night; but it is a way of hers—she does not mean half she says."

"I am sure to see her at the cottage sometimes, and I will do what I can to make up for your absence."

"She worships Aunt Gracey; and I hope she and Ruth may be friends. She's a nice little thing. Father's so fond of her."

Harry did not answer, though Philip's last words were almost in a questioning tone.

"What a provokingly reserved fellow you are! I want to know if you like her or not, now that you have met her at last."

"Like her! Philip, how can I say, after half an hour's conversation? She seems very bright and somewhat original, and—"

"Well?"

"A little masterful."

"O most cautious of men! I am glad I am not like you. I never measure my friends piece by piece as you do. I like them because I do, and find out their characters afterwards. Well, be kind to her for my sake, if you can't for your own."

Their hands met again as the train began to move, and in a minute Philip Langton was gone, sent back to a long-shunned life-duty by the constant, unvarying influence of his friend.

Harry turned from the station, and went back to his work at the bank, knowing that the one who had made the sunshine of his life for the last few weeks was gone from him. He was earlier than usual, and till the letters were brought in to him he took up the local daily paper, and glancing down the columns, Sam Bowler's name caught his eye.

"So that is where these few weeks have led some one else," he thought, as the contrast between what they had done for Philip and for this homeless lad struck him; and before the afternoon closed he had gone to see Sam. Being a friend of the chaplain's, he

easily gained admission into the prison, and before long was locked in the cell where Sam was confined. The reception that met him as he entered the door somewhat surprised him. The lad's whole face lit up with pleasure, he half started from his seat with an exclamation of surprise, shook the hand warmly that once again was held out to him; and then, as if ashamed of this display of feeling, sank back into the old indifference.

Harry did not know that the few kind words he had given him on the night of the accident had bound Sam to him by a chain absence and time could not weaken. Prompted by some strange, inexplicable feeling, night after night Sam had waited eagerly for Stevie's report of Mr. Langton. "He seemed to care so terrible, I wouldn't like him to lose him," Sam had said one night, and after that Stevie had undertaken to go regularly the errand Sam was too shy to go himself. Thus his knowledge of the two friends had been kept up; and now, in the midst of all the hard, evil thoughts that were filling every corner of his mind, came this unexpected outside distraction of a visit from Harry.

"I am so sorry you are here," Harry said. "I saw it in the paper, so I came to see you. You helped us so much the other day, I should like to help you now."

"'Tweren't much as I did," Sam muttered; and then he asked, "Have you got the paper? can you read me what it says?"

Harry drew it from his pocket and read the few lines relating to him under the heading, "Drunk and Disorderly."

"Tain't much to come in for; I might have done more while I was about it. It's mean, I call it, to put them things in print. That young Fraser'll go and read it, I s'pose. Well, I'm as good as 'im any day, no matter how much of a gen'leman he makes 'imself."

"Jack Carter will be sorry," Harry said quietly.

Sam fixed his keen eyes on him. "Who's told him? Fred Fraser, I 'specs; just like him. Well, let him be; I don't care."

But Sam's eyes moved uneasily, and he looked anywhere but at Harry while he spoke.

"But you do," Harry answered. "Hasn't he often said little things that have made you know he cares; and when he reads of you 'drunk and disorderly,' will not he be disappointed and very sorry?"

"Maybe," Sam answered; and Harry went on:—

"And Stevie cares,—that little friend of yours. I caught sight of him just now, and wanted to ask him for a message, but he ran away."

Sam was silent. He only knew how Stevie would care,—all the taunts and mortifying remarks that would be thrown at him. But that kick—had the little boy not minded that? was he his whole-hearted slave and pupil still? Then why had he brought no money that night? Stevie, Jack, and Mr. Carden

all sorry,—at least he said so. But how differently! Some glimmering of this thought passed through Sam's mind, and he looked up at Harry with all softer expression gone.

"It's no good none o' yer botherin' over me. I is bad, and I likes to be; and I don't care nothin' about all what yer talks about. It does for some, but it don't do for me. Who'd let me try and be like them other chaps when I comes out?"

"I am sure I could find you a place, if you would only try to earn a living honestly," Harry answered.

"Could yer? Look at my jacket then, and my 'at, and all them holes in my clothes. Would yer let me as much as run an errand and say I comed from you?"

"But you would soon earn fresh clothes," Harry answered.

"S'posing I could, there ain't none in Bransdale as would employ me. There ain't no shop, nor works, nor nothin' as I could go to. Bless yer, if I did take another name, they'd know soon enough. It's no good yer a-talking. I guess them as made me knowed what they was about."

"But down in the country," Harry answered, "or out of it altogether. I would try to find you work there. Will you let me help you? I will do all I can."

But Sam shook his head. "I couldn't go away—not right off. There's some as would miss me; and

hall my old chums, I'm used to 'em. They've always something to say to a feller; and if my luck's a bit down, they hands out free-like and stands treat. I couldn't go right away."

"But think where it is all leading to—think of all the sorrow to yourself and others. Step after step you are going down-hill; and where will it all end?"

"I dunno; and what's more, I don't care. I s'pose I'll die—be hanged, perhaps. It's all the same; they always says I was born for it."

"Sam," said Harry quietly, "you have got into the way of saying and laughing at such things; but do you ever think that they may really come to pass? Do you believe them true? Have you ever thought that this God, whose name you use so lightly, is very near you? Have you ever thought that he cares for you very much?"

"Then why didn't he make me a gentleman? I might 'ave got along then and been different. I don't s'pose you knows much about what kind o' fellers we really is. And I guess He's the same; He looks after you rich folk, and we poor must get along as best we can."

"Would you listen, Sam," Harry said, "if I read you just a little piece out of the Bible?"

Sam nodded, and Harry turned to the first chapter of Mark and read a few verses, stopping directly he saw Sam's interest waver. He spoke so as to interest the boy, and told how the only One who ever

had the power to choose his position in life chose to be poor.

"Was he real poor?" Sam asked. "Couldn't he so much as pay a lodging?"

"So poor, he said the foxes were better off."

"And real hungry?"

"Yes," Harry answered, and told him all he could of the sort of life the "Man of sorrows" lived on earth.

"But was the folk then like what we is now? Did they talk like we does when there's a lot on us together? We'd shut up sharp enough if you comed in. You don't know nothin' of all that. I tells you we goes on sometimes till we's reg'lar wild, and we *must* go out and do summat. You gentlefolks knows precious little. Are you sure he ain't like that? Does he know all?"

"Yes, all," Harry answered quietly. "And he goes on all day and all night thinking and caring for you and watching all you think and do. You know it is not being poor that makes your life so sad; it is being bad. You know Jack is as poor as you, and yet his life is different, is it not? It is the wicked thoughts and wicked words that make you so unhappy; and this Friend that we have been talking about can do what neither I nor any one else can. He can give you the wish and the will to fight against all this, and he will give you a love for himself that will make you happy in doing it; and he can forgive the sad past of your life.

'He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good.'

Sam had looked up at Harry now and again as he was speaking, but his eyes were bent on the ground as he stopped. Then he suddenly raised his head.

"Did yer think you'd talk me good 'cause lots of chaps have tried? But it's no use, and I'm sorry if you really mind."

"I do," Harry said kindly—"I do mind very much. I should like to see you happier and better; and I shall not stop wishing it and thinking about you, though I may not see you again. But I must go. Have you any message for Stephen?"

"Tell him I'm sorry I kicked him; only he did ought to have brought the money that night. And tell him," he added, looking away, "not to drink any more till I comes out, and then I'll tell him why."

"You do not want him to come in here, do you?" Harry answered. "You would like to see Stevie turning all his quick shrewdness to something better. Could you not both begin together when you meet?"

"I've learned him too much," Sam answered, lifting his face with a sudden boldness. "I've made him what he is, and 'tain't likely he could unlearn it again."

"I will tell him," Harry said; and then he came away, wondering what it was possible to do with characters such as this.

"What is the matter, Harry? You look tired

to-night," Ruth said, meeting him in the garden at The Elms.

"Tired of knowing so much and doing so little? Yes, perhaps I am. It is so hard to understand the sadness of the lives around us. It is easy to talk of improving the masses; but when you go down to them, and meet them face to face, the power of evil and the utter want of heart make one's theories seem no good. There is no such thing as a mass after all—only men and women walking one by one into misery and ruin, and needing to be met one by one and turned to something better."

"Are you always thinking of other people, Harry? Aunt Gracey said you looked worn-out last night; and Dorothy said she thought you needed to learn there was such a person as Harry Carden in the world."

"Did she?" he said smiling; "perhaps—" But there he stopped, and Ruth went on.

"You will miss Philip, after having had him all this time."

"Yes, terribly. It was like stepping from shadow into sunshine to come up and find him here night after night."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SHEEP THAT WAS LOST.



THE weeks were again passing by till a certain Monday came, when suddenly some who had been separated widely in the interval were brought together.

Harry was busy at his room with his men's club. "Club" they called it, but what gave it any right to that name no one could say. Week after week, however, from twenty to thirty men assembled in that room and spent two hours pleasantly together. A notice on the board had all the previous week announced what would be the subject and who would be the speaker. There were friendly greetings and pleasant conversation as the members met. The men for the most part knew one another, and their aim was to make any stranger welcome. There were tidy black coats and rough working-jackets; there were clever and commonplace faces; anxious, worn, tired men; bright, hopeful, earnest men. They sat there together side by side. On this particular evening the subject before them was "Truth," and

Harry himself had undertaken to be the speaker. He was enthusiastically greeted as he stood up amongst them, for it was not often he addressed them; but he felt how closely the subject would touch them, and he thought rightly that they would take it better from him than any other. He stood there alone before them, looking round on the strangely varied faces turned towards him. This club of his was a peculiar satisfaction to him. It seemed to have begun and grown of itself. There was a good deal of temperance in it, but it was not a temperance society; there was a good deal of religion, but it was not a Bible class.

"If it must have a name," Harry would say, "A General Reform and Social Improvement Club would suit it best. But we are content with the definite article only. We want to be known by our deeds, not by our name." And they were. He was able to lead these men, because he did not merely point out to them paths that they should tread, but went down to them, and with his strong hand guided them along the rough road from their old life to a new. He helped them out of their natural indolent selfishness. He gave them work to do according to their ability as far as possible, and thus he won the confidence of this band he had gathered around him.

He knew they would not resent his plain speaking, and so he boldly opened the subject at once, and went from point to point. He spoke rapidly and

forcibly, throwing the whole energy of his mind into battling for the true and showing up the false. He made his hearers ashamed of the miserable shadows with which they were content. The world needed men of truth—true in life, in work, in speech. There was but one source for everything untrue—the father of lies. There was but one foundation for all true things—the belief that God is true. He asked them to look back across the days gone by—at the work they had done, the words they had spoken, the promises they had made, the plans they had formed, and then pray David's prayer, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts." Would not that searching show up such a world of evil within, we should be hopeless if One had not stood on this earth and said, "I am the Truth."

They all pretended to despise and hate hypocrites; it was their one cry against all religion; and yet they were terrible hypocrites themselves. They cried out for men to be true to themselves; and yet if a man from the bottom of his heart believed in God and tried to serve him, they immediately signalled that man out as a hypocrite. There were few things men did not dare to say in these days. They would lift up unclean hands to God's pure heaven and say there was no God. They could look round on God's fair creation and say no God of love created this; they could witness the ruining and destroying power of evil, and say it had no author. And the men who

said such things were called bold and honest. They could win followers; men were ready, very ready, to believe a lie. Everything seemed in confusion, and men, turning first one way, and then another, wanting something to lay hold of. He knew there were some tired of these shams, hating these untruths, and they wanted the rest from them all that could only be given by "Him that is true."

He went fully into the different points; and when he sat down, he invited any of his hearers to speak upon anything he had said with which they might not agree.

There was a moment's pause, and then a young man, with a round, sun-burnt face, rose to his feet. He did not look as though he were going to bring forward any very formidable argument; but all sorts of speakers were tolerated there, and the men welcomed him as they would any other. He held the back of the form in front of him tightly with his hands, and his lips moved nervously once or twice before he spoke.

"I likes what you says uncommon, sir, and lots of it be true enough. I knows, as I've acted out lies by the score, all just as you put it—saying this, and doing that, and cheating the master right and left over the work. 'Tain't about that I want to speak; it was about what you said about them promises in the Bible bein' all true. I tells ye I don't believe it; and this is why:—It's nigh three months now since

first I comed here, and what you said one night, sir, made me go home and take down the old Bible from the shelf—what my mother gave me, bless her!—and turn over the pages to see if it were really there what you said. It don't matter what it was. I ain't given to talking that sort, and don't you chaps laugh; but after that I took to reading a bit out to myself of a night, and sayin' my prayers reg'lar. Well, I went on all right for a bit; and then, sure, as soon as I had said 'Amen,' all the worst swearing as ever I'd heard, and all the bad thoughts, would come crowd-ing into my head, and I couldn't go to sleep nohow. There I'd lie hours, often enough; and sometimes I'd get up again, and walk as quick as I could for to get rid of them. Well, I went on like that till I was nearly drove mad; and then I throwed it all over-board, and it don't matter to me now whether I thinks good things or bad; I just don't trouble about it, and goes to sleep comfortable like. Now, you knows better than I what the Bible says about that sort of thing, and I says I've tried it, and it ain't true; and if one bit ain't, why, then, it's up with it all." The young speaker made a movement as though to sit down; then, turning again to Harry, he said: "No offence, sir; but I do think sometimes, when you gentlemen and them parsons call us brothers, and says how we've all the same hearts and same temptations, that ain't true neither. I don't say it's all easy for you, but I do say you ain't got the same *sort* of

things to fight against ; they aren't things as sticks to ye."

Again there was a short pause, and the men looked at one another to see who could answer this. Then a tall, powerful man rose. He had heavy, knitted brows, very dark hair and beard, and large, massive jaws. A first glance gave an impression of sullenness, but as soon as he began to speak his face lighted up, a real kindliness shone in his eyes, and the stern curves of his lips unbent into a smile that told of a large-hearted sympathy. It was rarely he spoke, and was far better known by his deeds than by his words.

"I am not sure but what it would be best to talk it over with you alone, Dick ; only I can see some of those behind you there think it all true. Maybe they've tried as you have, and found just the same. I know Dick, and he knows me too well for him to mind my saying that he did not tell the whole story. He forgot to tell us what sort of friends he went with in the day, and where he spent the evenings. He is steady, I know ; but he forgot to tell us he had not quite knocked off the drink altogether, and when he went to fetch it himself he stayed for a chat sometimes. Mates, there are some of us who are not one-half in earnest ; and the more easy we take our own part, the more bold we are in saying God is not doing his. We take every minute of the day and fill it up with our own affairs, and often enough let

the devil have a good share for his; and then when night comes we feel a bit dissatisfied, and wish we had not quite done all we have. Then down we go on our knees, and think if we say our prayers it will be all right. No wonder we can't send all the thoughts we have been thinking clean out of our heads in a minute. That is what I call saying your prayers as a sort of miserable make-up for all the bad of the day; and it is no good at all. If there is wrong-doing troubling you, just tell it all out bit by bit, and you will learn where you need to fight and watch. But it is no good unless you mean to. I know temptation is hard enough. I know it's terrible for you young working-men, and the swearing and the bad thoughts are a curse to us others know nothing about. But do you think the Master in heaven has forgotten what a working-man's temptations are? They say they were a rough lot where He worked down in Nazareth. If we go to Him with the sort of prayers we should want to make to One who really knows all about it, we should not come back and say it is all no good. Wasn't I pretty right, Dick, about the way the days went?"

There was an honest though shamefaced look on Dick's face as he answered, "Maybe you've hit the right nail on the head, Mr. Graham. I'll speak after you next time."

The discussion then passed to other points, and the clock was pointing to a quarter to ten when Harry

stood up to close the meeting with a few verses from the Bible. He had hardly risen when the door was suddenly burst open, and every head was turned to see who the intruder could be. He never heeded them, however; the small keen eyes were fixed on Harry only as he pushed through them to where he stood. He drew his breath hard and fast, and the white lips seemed to tremble a moment as Harry bent down to him and took the small cold hand within his own.

"What is it, Stevie? do you want me?"

"It's Sam," was the answer. "He's cryin' out for yer awful, so I've comed for yer;" and then the boy's tone and manner altered as he added, "though I'm sure I don't know why he wants you."

"At once?" Harry asked.

"'Specs if you wants to be any good you'd best come now," Stephen answered, withdrawing his hand from Harry's, and speaking as though, now he had done it, the thought of asking a favour was intensely distasteful to him.

"I will come," Harry said, and then turned to the men, who were looking curiously at this strange little intruder. His bare feet had left wet footmarks all up the room. His ragged clothes were soaked with rain, and drops were falling from the apology for a cap stuck sideways on his head. The hard little face had assumed its wonted indifference to all around. A more forlorn, miserable figure could hardly

be imagined; and there was a half-wonder in the watchers' mind what claim this little fellow could have upon the one by whose side he stood.

Harry turned to them as soon as he had heard what Stephen wanted.

"I must apologize for leaving you so suddenly," he said, "but this little lad has brought me a message from one who needs me just now more than you.—Fletcher, will you take my place at the harmonium?—And, Sterne, will you kindly put it to the vote which of these three subjects we shall have next week?—I must ask you to mark the attendance for me, Jones.—And, Dick Barnes, will you tidy up and take the key to old Mr. Morris?—Good evening."

"Good evening," the men responded, each one coming forward to perform the duty assigned to him, and in a minute Harry was walking briskly down the street with his little ragged companion.

As they descended the stairs, Graham rose and followed them. There was a shade of anxiety in those dark eyes, and the heavy brows knitted more firmly as he turned up the collar of his coat and walked after the retreating figures, drawing nearer and nearer to them unobserved as they turned from street to street.

The boy was too excited, too wrought up by conflicting emotions, to give Harry any clear idea of why he had fetched or where he was leading him. One moment he would speak quite freely, and the next

give some short, ungracious reply, and it was difficult to piece together the disjointed sentences and read the tale of sadness they disclosed. We, however, must turn back and trace the events that had been slowly leading to this night's occurrence.

Sam's short term of imprisonment had ended two days after Harry's visit to him, and he had left those gloomy doors without any definite purpose. He had turned over Harry's words slowly as he stood moodily alone: he had thought of Jack; he had conjured up a vision of what he would like to be,—and then he had thrown it all down and told himself he was a fool. And yet these thoughts preyed upon him, took such a hold of him that he often refused the food brought to him, and when he slept woke up with a sudden start and a sense of something about to happen. He did not understand himself. He did not know why it was that last time he had been within those walls he had given all his thinking time to planning fresh exploits; he had kindled again his hatred of control; and had come out only to outwit the police and outrival his companions. And now these thoughts and plans brought no excitement and gave no relief. He did not know why it was, when Harry was gone, he leaned down his head on his hard hands, and something like a sob escaped him, and he would have given anything to call him back again and unsay the words he had spoken. A sense of all he had missed in life seemed gnawing at

his heart. The rousing of his affections, the stirring of his conscience brought such conscious pain into his heart that, while he looked to see if he would come again, he often and often said to himself, "Why, why did I ever know them?" (for he put Jack and Harry Carden together.) "I'd never have felt like this if I hadn't;" and the tired look that Stephen had once seen there before came back and stayed upon his face.

But there was another cause too, and Stevie saw it when, with an unnatural eagerness, he sprang to his friend's side as he left the prison gates. The pale, haggard face that he had seen disappear in there was more pale and haggard when it came out, his clothes seemed to hang more loosely than ever, and his hands looked unnaturally thin. Stevie saw at once that Sam was ill. Sam was touched with the faithfulness of the little fellow.

"You here, Bony?" he said in his gruff, unmusical voice. "I thought you'd 'ave forgotten me like all the rest."

"I don't forget so easy," said Stevie, making Sam think of the savage kick he had given the child.

"No more don't I," replied Sam; and the hot blood rushed to Stevie's cheeks as he thought of the promised money he had failed to get his friend.

"I've got it now," he said; "but I tell yer I hadn't a copper on me then, and that's why I stayed away. 'Twere all that sneaking little Tom, as hid his money and told lies as I shouldn't know he had none. He's

kept clean out o' my way since, and I've never so much as seen him, or I'd have—Sam! what's up with you?"

Sam's walk was growing unsteady, and leaning his head down on his hands he coughed and coughed, till Stevie thought he would never stop. When he did, and stood panting for breath, he seemed hardly able to walk further. There was a public-house close at hand, and Stevie drew him in.

"There, sit down, and I'll get yer somethink," he said.

Sam suddenly thought of his message to Stephen, and wondered if it had reached him,—thought of all his floating visions of doing and being better. He had not had any drink all that time. He wanted it terribly just then. It would take away this pain in his side, this wretched feeling of weakness. Yes, he must. Here was Stevie by his side with it—the one little lad that cared for him—with a new anxiety in his eyes; it was in his hand. Yes; he must, he must. What did it really matter? He held the glass one doubtful moment in his hand, then put it to his lips.

"I knowed you'd want some as soon as you comed out, so I've saved up. But, Sam, does yer take on like that often?"

Sam shook his head, rose from his seat and went across to the bar, and there they loitered about, smoking and drinking, Stevie feeling quite in his glory as master of the occasion.

"Have you seen Mr. Carden?" Sam asked suddenly; and Stevie shook his head with a quick decision that showed he did not wish to.

"He didn't tell you, then, he'd been to see me?"

Another shake.

"I sent you a message," Sam went on, and he saw a look of disappointment on the boy's face. "It was not to drink till I came out, and I'd tell yer why."

Stevie's face hardened.

"You might 'ave spared yourself that trouble," he said; and for the sake of his answer Sam asked,—

"Why?"

"'Cause I'd 'ave knowed yer didn't mean it, and it was all that preaching-man's humbug."

"I did mean it; and he ain't a preaching-man."

"Well, yer don't mean it now," Stevie said.

"But I do, Steve; I don't want you to go to prison."

"Why?" said the boy suddenly, scrutinizing him keenly.

"'Tain't comfortable."

"Ain't it? Well, I ain't tried yet; but I tells yer, Sam, you're a fool, and you knows it. We's always got on well enough, and I don't see what you wants to set up to be a hypocrite for. 'Tain't likely as I as knows yer will take that sort of talk from you. I've done you many a good turn, and I have done you another now, and we'll have another glass to it. That young Fraser and Jack ain't hardly spoke since

you've been gone. I've done for them ;" and the boy finished his sentence with words that somehow struck Sam unpleasantly. But the mood passed ; Stevie managed too cleverly not to stir up again Sam's bitter feelings towards Fred, and the younger became the leader in driving away all vestige of good resolutions he had formed. So they went back again into their old life.

Harry met Sam one day, but he crossed the street and eluded him. Again he met him, so near that Sam was forced to stay.

"Not yet, Sam ?" Harry said, looking down with his kind, true eyes, and the old emotion swept over the boy's heart as he turned away his head and answered,—

"I ain't forgotten. Some day, perhaps, I'll give your way a try. I must go my own a while longer."

"Then promise, Sam, not to run away from me ; and when you do turn, I'm your friend. Do you believe me ?"

"Yes, sir," said the boy, looking up and wondering why he should care, and why not rather have nothing more to do with him. As he went down the street Harry heard that hollow cough, and he marked how thin and ill the boy looked.

Those autumn winds told on him, and as he lay awake night after night with the terrible cough strange thoughts would often come to him. In most of his accustomed haunts he was unwelcome at night

because of his cough, and many a rough word and oath was hurled at him when he woke his fellow-occupants in the room. He grew strangely sensitive on this point; and driven from one place to another, he and his little companion at last found an old loft where they could spend the nights alone together. It was above the miserable attics in one of the most miserable houses in Bransdale, and for a trifle the boys had joint-possession. To Stevie the sense of ownership was new and pleasant, and he took a pride in doing his best to stop up the many cracks and chinks that let the night air in, and now and then nailed up a picture on some sloping beam. Night after night they climbed the ladder to this loft; and with a new, strange sense of weariness, Sam would throw himself down on his bed of shavings and wonder why sleep did not come as once it did, and why he rose in the morning as tired as he went to rest at night. But there at least he was undisturbed. With his scant clothing, often with the rain-drops coming through the roof and the keen wind blowing in upon his face, he was safe from rough voices and rude oaths, and when the fits of coughing came there was only the echo of his own voice in the silent night to answer to him. That lone lad in the far-away garret might die for all that Bransdale knew or cared. It was only occasionally that Stevie woke up to hear him; and then he would sit up on his pile of shavings trying to look through the darkness, but

not daring to draw near his friend. It was becoming harder and harder for him to scrape together the necessary money. Sam seemed less able to do what once he had done, and not to have the spirit to attempt it. What he earned he chiefly picked up by loitering about the railway stations and opening cab doors, and what he gained there still went for drink. What was he to do when he felt weak and ill? Food was scarce, and drink was plentiful. It made him better for the time; and then to keep himself up when he felt he must give way, to give himself strength when the feeling of faintness came, he turned more frequently than ever to the drink, and so made himself more easily the victim of the disease that was sapping his life.

Then came the day when, for the first time, Sam looked at Stephen preparing to go out and did not offer to follow him. Stevie looked and looked again, moved restlessly about, and then asked—

“Ain’t you a-comin’?”

Sam shook his head, and as he did so a fit of coughing came on, and when he looked up again Stephen was gone.

Five minutes after he heard him come back again, and saw in his hand a glass of brandy and water. Sam drank it eagerly, and by-and-by, when Stephen had been gone some time, he turned out his pockets, counted the coppers eagerly, and went out into the street to buy more for himself.

"You must leave me now, Steve," Sam said one evening. "I can't earn nor get no more money, and I can't live on you. I'll go back along of my old chums, and if they won't have me, well, I'll—"

He did not finish the sentence; but Stevie understood, and instead of a serious answer gave one of his quick repartees that made Sam smile first and then become conscious of the opposition the little fellow would raise to such a step. So he let things drift along, and never asked how the needed supply had been obtained. Stevie's spirits never sank, in spite of his unusual anxieties; and he would give such humorous accounts of all his doings, and make his often narrow escapes and many strange adventures so amusing, that Sam learned to look for his home-coming as the one bright hour in the long day, and would often watch eagerly for the sight of that little rough head at the open trap-door.

The little boy could hardly say why he had taken this burden upon himself; it was more from a sense of justice than any other feeling. Sam had done for him what no other had; and on the whole it was pleasant to know that one hitherto so far above him had no other to depend upon. So his clever little head and his quick brains and sweet voice were busy all day in getting money, and often he was out the night through. His feeling towards Sam had never deepened into love, and it was in a strangely rough way that he cared for and tended him. He

was often cross, often came home half tipsy without the food for which Sam had been looking all day, sometimes even taunted his friend with his altered condition, and yet at the same time was jealous over him. Sam learned never to mention Jack's name; and though the little boy knew he was longing for a sight of him, he would have done anything rather than bring him there. The two had not met since Sam went to prison, and meeting was now impossible unless Stevie would bring them together. Jack was often in Stevie's thoughts, however. He had never forgotten that little pile of money he had seen him secrete in his handkerchief, and he often thought of it as Sam grew worse and the difficulty of providing frightened him sometimes.

"What have you got to-night, Bony?" was Sam's greeting one night as the boy came up the ladder more slowly than usual.

"Only that," he said, throwing down half a loaf of bread. "My luck's gone."

"Have yer had summat yersel'?" said Sam, looking up at the ragged little fellow.

"All I wants," he said, telling a lie, for that day no food had passed his lips.

Sam took up the bread; it was hard and stale. He broke off a little bit and tried to eat it.

"I believe I'm not hungry," he said, laying it down. "I wonder what they give sick folks in them 'ospitals?"

"No end of things," Stevie answered,—“sort of yaller shaky stuff, and wine no end, and brandy. Bless yer, they’ve fine times there. Does yer want to go?”

The last words came out a little wistfully.

"No," he answered; "it would be a rare job to get me down that ladder now. I've not moved since you went this morning. But I'd like summat nice to drink, summat what would stop this pain a bit."

Then they were quiet for an unusually long time. Stevie thought Sam was asleep, but he was thinking; and so was Stevie—thinking and planning how best to do the deed he contemplated. He started when the elder lad spoke.

"Do you ever see yer mother, Steve?"

"Saw her last night," was the brief answer.

"What was she doing?"

"Drinking—she always is," and the boy turned his hard little face full towards Sam.

"I think you must bring her to see me, Bony. Maybe she'd know summat as would set me on my legs again. She's sober in the mornin's, I s'pose?"

"She!" said Stevie, his eyes opening wide with astonishment—"she don't know nothink; and she would not come neither. She never sees me without having a row. 'Tain't likely I'd tell her where I was living. What does yer want, Sam?"

"I dunno," said the boy wearily, and turned away.

No, he did not. No one had ever loved him, and

he had loved nobody, and he was becoming conscious of it. Jack's friendship, Harry's kindness had been his only experiences of true sympathy. But they had been enough to show him something of all he had missed in life; and away from bad associates, forced to spend long silent hours in solitude, the lad's whole soul seemed empty, and vague longings for what he had never had kept alive within him a feeling of restlessness. So he had thought and thought, until at last he felt as though, if some woman would come and bring him food, some woman's hand brush back the tangled hair from his forehead, and give him something cool to drink, that then he could rest a little and dread the coughing fits less. And the only one he could think of was this little boy's drunken mother.

He spoke again by-and-by, but his voice was weak, for he was faint with long fasting.

"Could yer sing a little bit, Bony, do yer think?"

The boy nodded, and began one of the low, noisy songs that won him most applause in the taverns.

"Not that," Sam interrupted.

Stevie tried again, but Sam stopped him a second time.

"It's summat soft-like I wants."

Stevie puzzled for a minute or two, and then tried a sweet plaintive air. It seemed to him that this must suit. But Sam was not musical; it was words to

soothe he wanted, and the words Stevie was singing were both profane and coarse.

"That'll do, Bony," Sam said with unusual gentleness, as the boy finished the first verse; and Stevie's small face puckered up again, for he felt Sam was wanting something he could not give.

"I guess yer wants things what they sings down at Mr. Carden's room," he said,—*"like this,"* and he whistled over the tune of the hymn he once had sung there: *"At even, ere the sun was set."*

Sam listened to it—listened eagerly because of the name Stevie mentioned in conjunction with it. *"Does yer know the words?"* he asked.

Stevie shook his head. *"It's all about sick folks,"* he said.

"What about them?" Sam asked.

"About them going somewhere in the evenin' and getting made well."

"All on 'em?" Sam asked.

"Bless you, I dunno. 'Twas only one of their hymns what Tom sings—'twasn't true."

"Where did yer hear it, Steve?"

"In Mr. Carden's room," Stevie answered boldly. *"Bless me though, Sam,"* he exclaimed, suddenly recalling that evening,—*"he talked a whole lot about you."*

"Me!" said Sam, his pale face flushing with interest.

"Yes,—'twas fine; it was nigh as good as having

a funeral sermon. It was all about yer having helped 'im that 'ere night down by the river; and he thought you wasn't half bad, and as you'd done that once you might do a lot more good. And he made out as it were some good. 'Twas fine, I can tell you. Precious little he knew," Stevie added, afraid of showing how closely he had treasured up those words.

"What more?" Sam asked.

"Then there was a story about a some one called Stephen, and about him being killed all along as he was religious, and as how, when he was dyin'—"

But somehow Stevie stopped there; that word had never been mentioned by either of them. He felt Sam's quick, involuntary movement; he knew he dreaded to die, and yet the thought came often now to both of them, was it possible he should live?

Sam did not urge him to go on, and there was silence, while the daylight came less and less brightly through the tiny skylight.

"Stevie, you must bring Tom here; I wants him."

"Tom!" Stevie's voice and accent spoke all the feelings his little brother's name aroused.

"Yes, Tom. I wants him to sing to me; I wants to 'ear them hymns. When Mr. Carden came to see me when I was there, he talked lots. And Tom knows more nor you nor I. You ain't never been like I am now, Steve, and so yer don't know. I wants the little chap, so get him for me."

"Little canting hypocrite!" Stevie muttered; "I don't know where he is."

"We ought to have had him here, maybe," Sam answered. "He ain't a bad little chap, and he ain't never done you a bad turn. Stevie, you're hard on him."

"That's all you knows. 'Twas all along of him as you ever saw the inside of them blessed walls. He told lies, and kept the money to 'imself; and I ain't never paid him out, and he's kept clear of me, and ain't never been nigh home since. Where he sleeps I dunno; I s'pose Mr. Carden knows."

"Poor little chap! we've been hard on him, Bony. Could you get him soon, do you think?"

This new phase in Sam's illness was quite incomprehensible to Stevie, and yet in some strange way it exercised a strong influence over him and made him do unhesitatingly all that he was asked. When Sam had been cross and irritable, he had borne with him; when he had been silent and morose, he had amused him. But this half-patient, uncomplaining manner frightened the little boy, and he went down the ladder with the feeling that he *must* find Tom and bring him, distasteful though the task was and doubtful the result. So he went into the streets and searched up and down the old haunts where Tom had once sung for money and drink. Familiar faces and many a friendly glass met him as he went from street to street; but that forlorn, ragged little figure, that sweet,

clear voice, were nowhere to be found. Slowly at last, very slowly, he turned towards Mr. Carden's room, wondering if he must enter those doors in his quest and ask if Tommy Stone was there. He little knew how often Harry thought about him, little dreamed that every day since his one visit he had longed for the boy to reappear. Even if he had, that strange contradictory nature of his might have impelled him to keep further away. Reluctantly though he went, however, his feet soon carried him there, and as the clock struck a quarter to ten he stood outside; but there the same strange spell that had once bound him a listener within made him creep noiselessly up the stairs and stand listening for his own sake and not Tom's. Harry was speaking. He had evidently been reading from the first part of the fifteenth of Luke, though Stevie could not tell that, and he was drawing a picture of the lost sheep's liberty—away from the flock; no eyes to watch it, no will but its own to guide it, no way but its own to travel. Harry drew the picture as minutely as possible, and the boy who had lived in the midst of bricks and mortar seemed carried away to the rocky ups and downs of the wilderness wilds, and to see there the sheep free with the freedom it had chosen, but a lost sheep still. Then he spoke of the shepherd; and Stevie listened as he would to any tale so strangely new. It interested him; he liked to hear that the sheep was found, that all the shepherd suffered and bore was not thrown

away. He was glad the story ended with the words, "Rejoice with me."

He was preparing to steal away, thinking they would break up then, when Harry's voice again arrested him. What was he saying?—"Lost not amidst hills and valleys, but in the courts and streets—boys and girls, men and women." Then he drew their idea of liberty—Stevie's idea of it—no work, no masters, no rule, no law, and the sad ending of it all, just in the one case as in the other—weariness, homelessness, friendlessness. He could paint that too, and Stevie almost felt as though he must know some of his friends, he drew so exactly the downward steps, the wandering into crime and wretchedness. How many he could think of lost like that!

"No father, no mother, no home, no one to belong to, no one ever to come looking for you; but belonging to some One still. Some One knows your real names, where you live, and what you are; and he is seeking, seeking *you*—up in the garrets where you sleep, down in the streets where you wander, in at the public-houses, down in the music-halls, like the shepherd, just because he loves and wants you, and he is the only One who knows where all the wandering ends. The shepherd did not drive the lost sheep home; he took it up, and carried it just when it was farthest from the fold. It is no hard thing He wants you to do; only stop wandering away and let Him find you, and then you will learn what it is to

have a home and a friend, and you can tell him then about all the black past."

"I guess he won't find *me*," Stevie muttered to himself. "I'll just go my own ways, and nobody shan't bother over me; but Sam—maybe it's summat like this as he wants. Guess he's gone pretty far. I wonders now, I wonders if he's ever been looked for."

But Stevie's thoughts were stopped by a movement in the room. He had not listened to Harry's concluding sentence; he had not heard his short prayer. But now he started. His bare feet carried him noiselessly down the stairs, and he concealed himself outside to watch for Tom.

One by one the lads passed him—some old associates, whose absence from their usual haunt was explained by their presence here, some strangers—but Tom was not amongst them. Still he waited, for he could hear voices upstairs, and presently Harry came down, accompanied by two ladies. Stevie was surprised; but not more so than Harry had been when he had gone down that evening and found them there before him.

"I must apologize, Mr. Carden," Dorothy said. "It was I who brought Ruth here. I want to see all the Bransdale sights, and this came amongst them. We only want to watch, so we will sit quite still and will not interfere."

"Aunt Gracey thought you would not mind," Ruth said. "I have never been here on a boys' night."

Harry showed them all round, and then let them please themselves as to what they would do.

"Philip came here several times before he went away, so you will find friends of his amongst the boys," Harry said to Dorothy as they took seats at the farther end of the room, apparently intending to watch the proceedings without taking part. He went away to give a carpentering lesson in the workshop, and returning five minutes after saw Dorothy turning over the leaves of a book, and some four or five youngsters with their elbows on the table listening to her stories of the pictures.

She had taken a book off a shelf, intending to read to herself, but her attention had immediately been distracted by the remarks of two boys looking at some pictures near her.

"What's that thing a-tumblin' down for, Bob?" asked one.

"It looks like that 'ere tower what fell down when all the folks began to talk different like," replied Bob, looking very wise.

"They seems taking it verry cool then; that 'ere gentleman don't look much afeared of being smashed up."

Bob meditatively surveyed the individual, who, dressed in top hat and frock coat, looked a very unlikely representative of the builders of the tower of Babel. Then Dorothy, who had listened amused, drew near to the boys and described the leaning tower of Pisa so as to interest them, and turning

from picture to picture kept them laughing at the anecdotes she told them, and interested in the pictures of the different places, till it was time for the singing to begin.

Ruth meanwhile had seated herself near a would-be artist, and his surprise and delight to find that by following her directions the chairs and tables he was sketching really seemed to stand firmly on the floor, encouraged others to try their hand with pencil and paper; and she too found herself presiding over some six or eight.

"Will you come again, miss?" asked the brightest of her pupils. "T'other gentleman can draw the lines, but he can't say why, as you can."

Ruth smiled and looked up at Harry standing near. "May I?" she asked; "or is it turning some one else out of their place?"

"Do," he answered; and then he looked across to where the same question was being eagerly asked of Dorothy, and heard her negative.

"We should be glad to see you, Miss Dorian," he said. "Ruth hopes to come again; could you come with her some other evening?"

But she shook her head. "I came to see, and I have seen." And then as the boys turned to put away the books, she went on, "You think, as I have been once for my own pleasure I might come again for theirs. But what is the good of making friends when you have to lose them again in a fortnight?"

"You have interested the boys, and a little pleasure is surely better than none. They would all have been certain to come if you had told them you would be here one night next week."

"Perhaps I was thinking of myself," she answered. "I dislike taking up things and putting them down again at once, just as I dislike making friends with any one I am hardly ever likely to see again."

"That alters the case," he said, and touched the bell.—"Will you play for us, Ruth?" he asked, and then went straight on as usual, apparently without a thought for any but his boy listeners.

"You seem to understand how to talk to them, Mr. Carden. Did it take you long to learn?" was Dorothy's only comment as they walked downstairs. Then she turned and saw Jack putting out the lights and tidying up. She noticed his bright, open face, and asked who he might be.

"He is a friend of mine," Harry answered; and turning to Ruth added, "The boy I told you about who has and is a friend."

"What do you mean by a friend?" Dorothy asked.

"In this case I mean one who understands what I want without being told; who does with wonderful tact endless things to help me in the most unobservable manner. He seems to feel and think about the other boys as I do, and influences and helps them in a way which they cannot possibly resent."

"He has been here long, then?"

"No, only a few weeks. There is a sort of sympathy between us; we understood each other from the first. It is a pleasure to me to see him come into the room; it is a pleasure to him to come. I can only sum it all up in the word friend."

"Have you many like that?"

"No. There are certainly several who will do anything for me; boys I am heartily fond of. But then it is only *for me*; they are not the same help when I am away as when I am here. Jack is; and so is the one among the men who occupies the same place,—Graham."

"I suppose it is all these ins and outs that make what you do interesting, and keep you from getting tired; but at the same time they make it all seem less—not exactly heroic, but less noble."

"That is the untrue view of work so many take. We are not meant to toil without any reward."

"Reward? Yes, perhaps you get that sometimes; but you do not call this reward?"

"Not the friendship of those in a different social scale to myself, not their confidence, not the sense of being able to rely upon them in difficulty? It sounds too little for you to reckon it even part of a reward. Perhaps you have not tried it."

"Has your brother always been so different from other people, Ruth?" Dorothy asked when Harry left them.

"Yes; every one says so. I really have hardly known him till lately."

"It is strange he and Philip should be such friends," Dorothy said meditatively.

They had long passed from sight, and still Stevie waited, for there were yet footsteps above. But at last they came down the stairs, and as the little boy's eyes fell on Jack, his face hardened again like that of one grown old in crime. Some cruel purpose seemed to take possession of his mind, and from street to street he followed Jack unnoticed. He crept closer to him as he turned down to the back of the blacksmith's shed, and his wonder increased as he saw him slip aside a board from the broken window and make his entrance. He waited some minutes before he followed, and then found himself alone in the gloom of the shed. Fearful of moving, lest he should betray his presence, he stood motionless till a slight noise from above guided him to the foot of the ladder. There he sat and waited till there was silence above; and then he crept up to the top, and waited there till Jack's regular breathing told he was asleep. Past the great anvils he went, as Tom had done before; and then he stopped, and an exclamation nearly escaped him that would have awaked the sleepers. For Jack was not alone: only a few feet from the boxes on which he lay were two more, and there Stevie saw his brother. No look of pity, no glance of admiration escaped him as his eyes rested

on the child so beautiful in sleep. He ground his teeth, enraged to think his escaped victim had found a haven here. And then he turned to Jack, and before long the country lad's precious hoard was firmly grasped by those little fingers. He replaced the handkerchief, and then stole down, and once outside the shed counted the coins, and found he held nineteen shillings in his hand. It was slowly that Jack's savings had mounted so nearly to the desired one pound. He had had to buy a new working coat and boots, and these purchases had thrown him back; but that day the thought that the desired sum was so nearly attained had given an elasticity to his step and a cheeriness to his voice that had lately been wanting.

It was dark now, and the long night lay before Stevie. He dared not go back to Sam, dared not go anywhere to sleep; for as he saw Tom by Jack's side, another plan had hastily formed itself in his brain, and sleep might be fatal to its accomplishment. So through the long night he paced up and down that narrow back street, lying down now and again for a few minutes, and then starting up and pursuing his restless wanderings. One hand held the stolen coins safely. As morning dawned he watched the broken window anxiously, hoping that Tom might be the first riser. His hope was realized. As he often did, the little boy woke early, and left his friend asleep while he went out. Stevie saw the small fingers pushing aside the board, and sped noiselessly down

the street, then turned to watch, and as he saw Tom nearing him, sped swiftly onwards, then turned again and sauntered back in a careless, leisurely way. Tom was running along at his usual slow trot, with his hands in his ragged pockets. He saw Stevie, and his whole face flushed up with pleasure, then faded into fear. Cruel blows had ended their last meeting, and had kept him away from his brother since: what might this bring? Stevie hardly understood the look of pleasure; he saw the fear, and felt an angry contempt for the little fellow, and looking at him asked the old question, "Got any money?"

Tom put his hand deeper into his pocket and handed out three halfpence.

"Them's hall," he said, and he felt the least little satisfaction at having even such a trifle to offer.

"You come along of me; Sam wants you," Stevie said gruffly, dropping the coppers into his pocket.

Tom turned to follow, only too glad to be near his brother again, but at the same time shrinking from the idea of seeing Sam.

They went in silence. Tom ventured one question, but Stevie did not answer, and by-and-by he obediently scrambled up the ladder after him.

"Here's the youngster," Stevie said, going across the floor; but Sam did not move.

"Here's Tom," he said, stooping down; and then a cold fear ran through him. What made Sam so white and motionless?

Tom had crept near, and he was smitten with a sudden fear, ushered thus suddenly into this strange dark loft.

"Is he drunk?" he whispered; and Stevie struck him.

"You young fool!" he answered. "He's ill, don't yer see? Give me that water."

Tom passed it. Stevie opened a bottle and added brandy, and raising Sam's head poured a little down his throat; and presently Sam opened his eyes. Stevie gave him more, and after lying quiet a little he seemed to revive.

"You've been gone a long while, Stevie," he said faintly. "I think I was hungry."

"I'll go and get summat. Here's Tom; he'll stay with you."

Sam looked up and saw the little fellow with his large eyes full of pity fixed on him. Stevie scrambled down the ladder again; and Tom drew himself away and seated himself on the floor, looking at the figure stretched on the sack of shavings beside him. Sam's eyes were shut, and Tom stared as if fascinated. The face he always had hated looked just as hateful there—the low forehead, the coarse expression, the tangled hair. His cheeks might be deathly pale, his lips colourless, but there was nothing less ugly and repulsive. Gradually Tom edged himself away as far as he could. He thought Sam did not notice, but he did, and that strange sensitiveness that was growing

upon him day by day made him feel it. So they kept silence; and by-and-by, when hours seemed to have slowly passed, they heard Stevie creeping up again. His face was flushed and excited, and he was carrying something carefully in a bag between his two black little hands. He came across the room and put it down by Sam, then turned to shake the bread crumbs from their one unbroken plate, and as he opened the paper proclaimed triumphantly,—

“I’ve got some for yer, Sam—some of that yaller shaky stuff they has in th’ ’ospital, and it’ll do yer real good, it will.”

Even Sam’s face lighted up with some degree of interest as Stevie disclosed the jelly he had purchased, and as he lifted the large leaden spoon to his lips with the first mouthful, he said contentedly, “That’s good, it is.”

Stevie watched him with satisfied eyes, and only grumbled because he could not take as much as he wished; and by-and-by Sam went to sleep again. Stevie set Tom to watch him, and went out, leaving behind him a warning that made the little boy fearful to leave, though terrified to hold so responsible a position. Stevie was in and out all day, and even ungraciously shared some of his food with Tom; but as evening drew on he disappeared as usual, and the little boy was left alone to care for Sam as best he could.

He came in more than half intoxicated about mid-

night, and found Sam faint and exhausted with a long fit of coughing, and Tom, shivering with terror, standing over him. He went away to his own corner and threw himself down to sleep; and poor little Tom looked wistfully across at the brother he so cared for in spite of all his faults, and then back at Sam. The elder lad understood.

"You can have a corner there," he said, pointing to the foot of his own rough bed; and Tom curled himself up like a kitten. But Sam roused him again.

"Tom," he whispered, "give me some more of yon cold stuff; this 'ere pain's enough to kill one."

Tom reached the plate, and Sam took the heavy spoon in his hand; but his fingers trembled so he could not raise it, and he looked up at the little fellow hopelessly and helplessly.

"Give me a little bit, Tommy," he whispered again, and, with a sudden instinct how, Tom fed him slowly and gently. It was the first thing he had really done for him, and in the doing of it the fear of the bad boy left him.

"Could you sing," Sam asked, "that about the sick folks what Steve told me of?—He won't hear," he added, as Tom looked apprehensively towards the corner.

Tom sat down again, and in his sweet childish voice sung the hymn through, and then went on to his own favourite—

"There is a happy land,
Far, far away."

Then he curled himself up. And the two ideas seemed to blend into one in Sam's mind, and he thought, perhaps after all it was not here but in that far-off land the sick folk were made well. And through the long night he battled manfully with the evil thoughts that always assailed him so terribly then, and he guarded his lips from profane words when the fits of coughing came.

So two more days passed, and Stevie was able, with his newly-acquired wealth, to bring him little delicacies that sometimes he could eat; but with them he always brought brandy, and the lad's craving for it only grew stronger as he grew weaker and weaker. Then one night, when some movement of his had wakened Tom, and he had crept out to see what he could do, Sam stretched out his burning hand and laid it on the little boy's arm.

"Tom," he whispered hoarsely, "I want Jack Carter; fetch him now—I'm dying."

The last word came out in a low moan, and Tom turned and fled. All Stevie's threatenings were forgotten. He knew Jack cared for Sam, and all along had wanted to fetch him, but had not dared, and, ignorant of what his friend was attributing to him, he sped through the darkness, he let down the window, crept swiftly up the ladder, and went to the well-known corner, gently crying, "Jack! Jack!" He put

out his hands in the darkness to feel for him, and drew them back again. Jack was not there. The two boxes were piled one upon the other, the piece of matting was gone; the little boy stood alone in that lonely loft, and the least sound he made seemed to prolong itself strangely in the silence. He was sorely perplexed to know what to do,—wait till Jack should come to work in the morning, or go back to Sam's side now? He decided on the latter; but as he reached the foot of the ladder Stevie met him.

"Where have you been?" he asked angrily.

"Sam wanted Jack Carter, and I went for him," Tom answered boldly.

"Then take that, and that, and that!" Stevie answered, striking him angrily on the side of his head. "I won't have none of your Jacks here."

"Well, he ain't comin'; he wasn't at home," Tom answered, eluding another blow.

"Don't let me hear of yer sneaking out again," Stevie went on, looking relieved. "I'll go for Jack myself when he's wanted. Sam might 'ave died if it hadn't been for me. Now you stay there, or I'll—" and Stevie doubled up his fist and sent his little brother up the ladder with words that made him only too glad to reach the top safely.

Sam's hungry eyes and eager request, "Is he coming?" met him, and the little boy was sorry to answer,—

"No; but Steve's gone to look for him."

And by-and-by Stevie came back, and when Sam asked the same question, he answered,—

“No, he ain’t; and what’s more, I won’t go to none of yer stuck-up friends no more. *He* come and see *you*, and you been in prison! Bless me! he’s a mile too fine. He was all a-humbugging you, pretending to be chums.”

Tom’s countenance fell, and over Sam’s there passed a deeper shade of hopelessness; and Stevie went out again, glad to think he had ended all chance of Jack’s discovering their abode. So Jack did not know that a wish he had expressed one day had come true,—that days of trouble had come to Sam, and that he had sent for him, confident he would not fail him. And there was no one there, by-and-by when Stevie had gone out, to see big tears of disappointment roll down Sam’s cheeks. The lad gave way to a feeling of being utterly forsaken. In their own way the little brothers did what they could—Stevie was active, often anxious; Tom watchful, always tender—but weak, weary, worn, and ill, Sam still wanted what they could not give, though for their sake he kept silence.

But after a while an evening came when he could be silent no longer. All through the day he had seemed to see Harry Carden standing before him, and to hear his voice ringing in his ears, “I am your friend; do you believe me?” And when the night came the longing for a sight of him became too

strong to be concealed. He was half delirious, and began to implore Stevie to go and fetch this one who had been so kind to him before. The boy withstood him as long as he could; but Sam begged till he brought on a fit of coughing, and then unconsciously moaned his request over and over again, till at last, too afraid to refuse, too terrified to coin another lie, Stevie went. It was then, and then only, anything like sorrow connected with the thought of losing Sam came over him, and sent him through the rain and up into the club-room with pale face and white trembling lips.

The little boy preceded Harry up the narrow stairs, and then up the ladder into the loft. He had left a lighted candle on the floor, and it was shedding its weak, flickering light over the desolate scene. Tom was sitting near Sam, fast asleep, with his head resting on his folded arms; the sick lad on his miserable bed was lying still, with closed eyes, and though he opened them as Stevie and Harry approached, he did not seem to recognize them.

Stevie turned a quick inquiring look up into Harry's face, and as he saw the expression there he was not sorry he had brought him. Why, he did not know, but Stevie's thoughts instantly travelled back to Harry's own words about that Shepherd: it seemed to him as though he had pictured him with a look on his face somewhat like that when, after all the searching and toiling and suffering, he found "the sheep that was lost."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A BEGINNING.



THE rain was still pouring down. It had been dripping through the loosened slates the whole night, and it was with difficulty that Harry and Graham moved Sam to a corner where air and water were more easily excluded. Graham had joined Harry a few minutes after he had entered that loft, and he was glad he had done so when he saw the work that lay before them.

It was difficult at first to know what to do where there was absolutely nothing,—no food, no drink; nothing to make up an easier resting-place upon; nothing before them but the suffering lad and the sleeping child. Harry sent Graham to the cottage with a note, however, and in an hour he returned with an abundant supply of things that Miss Gracey kept for lending under such circumstances. An hour or so more, and they were watching Sam quietly sleeping in the bed that they had made for him.

They put up a curtain across the loft, and the whole place soon looked different.

"The young lady gave me this," said Graham, producing a bag; and opening it, Harry found inside a number of things he had forgotten on his list—little comforts and little luxuries that made the task of nursing easier.

Graham did not tell how closely Dorothy had questioned him, how she had herself packed up the things, or of his answer to her question:—

"It was just the saddest sight I ever saw, miss, and I've seen many. There was that poor lad—bad I know he is, but poor all the same—as ill as he could be, with no one but two bits of boys to look after him. I know the elder, and a rare scamp he is too; and it was knowing him to be such as he is made me follow Mr. Carden. I waited a bit, thinking he'd come down again, and then went up the stairs and up a ladder into as dingy a loft as ever I saw; and there he was, holding Sam's hand, and looking down on him as sad and as pitiful like as if it were Mr. Langton himself. There was one little chap asleep, and the other leaning against the wall looking half mazed and half defiant. I don't mind telling you, miss, it made me feel queer-like; but then he's always doing things like that. There are no words long enough to say all he has done in Bransdale. We working-men we just knows it; and though maybe some of us cannot see him often, it does us good to

feel he is there; and there isn't one of us but prays every day, 'God bless him,' and that's pretty nigh all we can do for him."

Graham, usually so silent and reserved, was surprised at himself for this long speech; but his heart was full of thoughts of Harry, and it was a relief to speak them out.

"And are *you* going to stay all night?" Dorothy asked.

"Yes, miss; it's hardly likely I should leave him alone."

"But you will have to work to-morrow."

"I've stood many a night's work in the factory," he answered; "and 't isn't the first time Mr. Carden and I have worked together at this sort. If any man wants to know what it is to love them poor wandering things, all as full of bad as they can be, let them spend a night with Mr. Carden."

She was providing him with a substantial supper while he answered these questions, and she saw him off, wishing she were going too.

"Miss Gracey," she said, going up to her room, "do you think I could go in the morning and see this boy? It does not seem as though two men could know what to do, if he is ill."

"Yes, if you will take Martha. But do you think you will know what to do? You have hardly ever been in a room like I fancy Sam is in."

"I have had plenty of nursing to do," she answered

half sadly; "and I suppose it is better to know. If you do not mind, I should like to."

"I shall be glad, and so will Harry," Miss Gracey answered.

Thus it was that as the daylight came struggling through the rain-clouds, and the noises in the street began to tell of life and business again, Harry and Graham heard gentle voices and soft footsteps on the ladder, and looking across at the trap-door they saw a brown hat. Harry started from his seat and went across in time to give Dorothy his hand as she stood at the top of the ladder.

"Miss Dorian," he said, "indeed this is not a place for you to come to. If Aunt Gracey had anything or any message to send, she should have sent a servant."

"Martha is with me," Dorothy answered, looking round; "and I came of my own accord. No one sent me."

"You will let me take you back then," he said. "I am in earnest; I should not like you to stay here."

"That is a pity," Dorothy answered, "because I have come to stay."

She spoke in her usual resolute way, but her eyes were wandering round that bare dreary loft. The very little comforts they had introduced seemed only to show up the misery and squalor more clearly. It was new to her, and struck her painfully. There was

silence as she stood taking it all in; and there was a half-frightened expression on her face as she lifted her eyes to Harry's and said in a voice not quite under control,—

“Mr. Carden, is it true? must he die *here*?”

He did not want to answer, but her look demanded it.

“He can never be moved,” he replied.

“And can never get well?”

“No.”

She dropped her eyes; he fancied her lips half trembled; but she turned her face away, and before either could speak again a groan from Sam made Harry hastily push aside the curtain and kneel down beside him.

The lad was moving his hands restlessly. He caught hold of Harry's eagerly, and held it so long that he retained his clasp when finally he sank into a restless sleep again.

Dorothy and Martha had been busy unpacking more things that they had brought. Harry did not pay much heed to what they were doing, but presently he saw Martha bringing him a cup of tea. He took it gladly, and tried to look across his thanks to Dorothy. But she and Graham were busy arranging a little table, and she did not look towards him, and went on doing what was necessary, apparently unconscious of any presence but her own. In reality, however, she was closely observing them, and the scene before her seemed photographing itself for ever on her mind.

Harry looked tired, but there was something wonderfully strong and tender in his expression, and his patience with the restless sufferer seemed inexhaustible. Little Tom was still fast asleep curled up at Sam's feet, and the beautiful boy offered a marked contrast to the dying lad.

Dorothy found the answer to some of her questions there. It was only love of some sort that could have held any one so long beside the poor, ugly, evil lad.

"Loving for the love of Thee."

The words rose unbidden to her mind. She had doubted them when spoken; she believed them now.

She went across presently to where Harry was seated on the floor.

"You must go home now, Mr. Carden; it is getting late."

"You must let me accompany you first," he answered.

She saw he would resist her, and went on rapidly,—

"You must be at the bank to-day; must you not?"

"Yes," he answered; "I have business I must get through."

"And Graham must go to his work?"

"Yes; he is foreman."

"Then who is to stay here? Mr. Carden, you are unreasonable. You have far too many theories; I

am practical. Here is a little thing I can do, and you oppose me. Ruth will go and read to Aunt Gracey, and Martha and I can easily stay till six or seven to-night. It is a tumbled-down old house, I know, but it is in a respectable part, and not very far from The Elms. Ruth might come in and see me, or send me down some lunch. You know yourself some one must be here; and I understand nursing. I nursed my father when we lost him, and I was constantly with mother. He will sleep almost all day—I know enough to see that—and we will watch and feed him.”

“But why should you do it?” he asked, his real objections melting away before her arguments, and his resolution wavering before her half-determined, half-appealing manner.

“Why?” she answered impatiently; “because I want to. I am not quite heartless, and you say he must die. I have as much right here as you. I can feel sorry sometimes, but it is not often anything of that sort is wanted from me. Now, go and take this little boy; your sister will give him some breakfast.”

Tom was stirring. He glanced half terrified round the loft and at the stranger figures there, then he saw Harry. The beautiful colour flushed up into his face, his eyes brightened, and half involuntarily he said, with such a ring of content in his voice,—

"O Mr. Carden!"

Harry stooped down and pushed back the tangled hair from his forehead.

"I have taken your place for a little, Tom; and now I want you to come with me. Sam is asleep, and this lady will stay with him."

The beautiful eyes were turned inquiringly up into Dorothy's face, and, apparently satisfied, went back to Harry's again, and the small hand placed itself in his.

"Another that he cares for," she thought, and the feeling crossed her mind that perhaps he cared too easily and for too many; but the beauty of the child's face touched her, and his varying expression told her the affection was not all on one side.

"So I have my permission," she said, answering Harry's remark to Tom.

"What will Philip say?" Harry answered. "He does not altogether approve of what I do; he will hardly be pleased that I should in any way give you similar interests."

She opened her lips to say she did not care, but somehow could not. They always spoke as though her cousin had some right to approve and disapprove of her doings, and she resented it inwardly.

A few minutes after, and Dorothy and Martha were left alone with the still sleeping lad.

Harry took Tom straight to The Elms. He knew

nothing of the theft it was supposed the little boy had committed, and he asked no questions why he had shunned him for so long and why he was by Sam's side. He felt how glad he was to be with him again; and the bare feet trotted along wonderfully contentedly by his side.

"This is Tom, the little boy like you, Frank," Harry said, as his little nephew caught sight of him and bounded down the drive to meet him.

"Is it?" he answered, and stretched out his hand to the ragged child. "Where shall I take him?"

"Into the kitchen, Frank; and see that he has a good breakfast."

So the children went off together, while he joined those in the dining-room and told of the night's doings.

"It seems very unlike Dorothy," Mr. Barrett said.

"Not unlike her real self," Ruth answered rather hastily; "you hardly know her yet, Leonard."

"She does it all in such a matter-of-fact way, just as though it were the natural and right thing. There is not the least hurry or uncertainty in any of her movements. Poor old Martha looked fairly amazed, she never could help fussing."

"They always say you shattered her nerves at the age of two, Harry, so the blame is yours. I wonder what Philip will think of this freak of Dorothy's?"

Ruth rose and went to the window as she said this, and Harry followed her, saying,—

“He will not mind, but at the same time I can hardly understand how it is she and Philip should be such friends.”

“Friendships are always unaccountable,” she answered, thinking of almost similar words that Dorothy had used regarding Philip and himself.

Frank burst into the room at this moment, staying any answer Harry might have made.

“Mother,” he exclaimed, making his way up to her, “he is so dirty, his hands and his face; he’s dirty all over. May he have a bath? Was he like that, do you think, when Uncle Harry took him in his arms? because—I don’t like it.”

They smiled at his earnestness, smiled at the difference between the ideal little boy, whom to kiss and to carry seemed so desirable, and the unwashed, ragged little fellow who was eagerly devouring bread and butter below.

Permission for necessary ablutions was readily given, however, if nurse would undertake it.

By-and-by Frank reported that Tom was duly cleansed, but also that he would have no other than his old clothes put on him again. Persuasions were of no avail; he only looked at them wistfully, and said he would rather not. So they were forced to dress him in his rags again; and then Frank led him in to show him to his mother. They stood side by side

for a minute on the threshold of the dining-room—Frank every inch the little gentleman, his bright face full of animation and sympathy; Tom by his side, with frightened, doubtful eyes, looking in upon that scene of home comfort and happiness with a strange wonder. His sun-burnt hands and face were brown but clean, whilst his jacket hanging loosely round him showed a neck washed white for the first time for many a long day. His hair had been parted and brushed back as smoothly as the thick curls would allow, and probably Tom's beauty had never shown to greater advantage than as he lingered doubtfully in the doorway.

Frank dropped his hand and sprang across to his aunt at the farther end of the room. Emily turned at once and called the little ragged boy to her. The contrast had struck both her and her sister, and it struck them again more painfully as those little bare feet trod the soft carpet reluctantly, and the boy looked frightened to come near her. Emily only felt sorry that it should be so. Ruth questioned with herself why it was.

"Little Tom," Emily said, putting out her hand and taking the child's in a kind motherly way, "my little boy and I have often talked of you. We are glad to see you here."

He lifted up his large eyes to her face with something of that strange inquiring earnestness that had so struck Harry the first day he met the boy. Emily

was just going to ask if he had had a good breakfast, but this look stopped her. The natural impulse was to take the child upon her lap, to kiss that beautiful little face, and give him some of the mother's love that had never come into his life. Ruth felt it from her distant seat. Emily drew him a little nearer.

"Poor little fellow!" she said; "and have you no mother to look after you? Where do you live?"

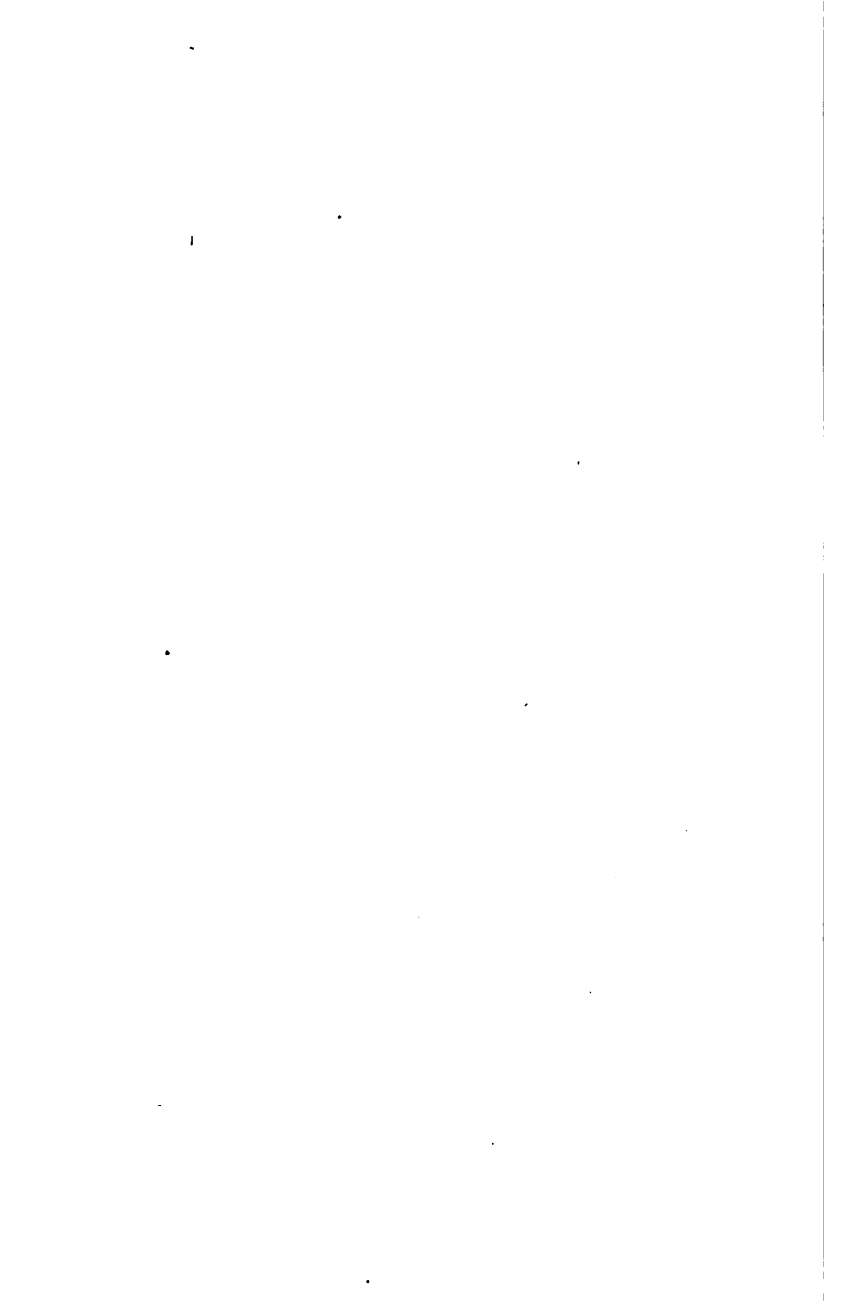
"Anywheres," he answered. "I ain't partic'lar. I goes to a lodgin' 'ouse when I've the money."

The harsh, uncultivated twang of his voice, his unrefined expressions, jarred upon Emily, they seemed so out of keeping with his whole appearance. Almost unconsciously she loosened her hold upon his hand; he was only a little common boy after all. As she was about to speak again, the door opened, and the nurse brought down the two little girls. To Tom's bewildered eyes they seemed visions of beauty in their white dresses, and he drew back as Emily took the baby, and Dolly unbidden advanced towards him with outstretched hand. He took it shyly, and saw her turn back again and climb into her mother's chair, whispering the little boy had no shoes and stockings. He saw the child's arms go round her mother's neck, and heard soft words pass between them. Just for half a minute that vision of love and beauty was before him, and then Emily called Ruth and asked her to take him back to the kitchen.

As the door closed behind them, Frank came across



LITTLE TOM.



the room, and leaning his arms on the back of his mother's chair, said,—

“Mother, nurse said when she combed his hair and pulled at it he swore at her.”

“Perhaps he does not know that it is wrong,” Emily answered.

“Where did he learn, mother?” pursued the boy.

“I don't know how.”

So Tom went back to the kitchen only a little common boy after all—only a little street wanderer, who that day for the first time had seen what a mother's love could be, and had felt a woman's loving touch upon his hand. The cook was kind to him, and, won by his pretty face, could not understand how, after all the nice things she had given him to eat, she found him by-and-by leaning his head down on his arm on the window-ledge, with big tears rolling down his cheeks. What was the matter? she asked; but he only shook his head, and the tears came faster and faster. He did not know himself; he did not know that his whole soul was hungry for some good woman's love, and that what he had seen in the dining-room had made him conscious of it.

He had fallen asleep, when about twelve o'clock Ruth came for him to show her where she would find Dorothy.

“I wonder Mr. Carden does not send him to some of those homes or reformatories,” cook said, wiping the flour from her hands, and looking across at the

little ragged figure. But the suggestion struck Ruth as out of place, and she answered quickly,—

“Oh no; he’s too—” She hardly knew how to define it, so only said “pretty.”

“Well, I must say he isn’t like most of them,” cook answered.

And he was not, and there are not many like him. Most little street boys would only have thought with glee of the chance of a good meal; most would have thought and felt nothing about what he had seen; almost all would have taken the clothes to sell, since it was not safe to wear them. But among the masses, among the forgotten and the lost ones, there are some such—little children with a natural refinement no circumstances can drive away, with sensitive souls and loving hearts that wear out their frail bodies with their earnest craving for something to satisfy, something to help them.

Dorothy looked up from her post as Ruth came up the stairs. There was a shadow in her brown eyes, perhaps of present anxiety, perhaps of past memories that had crowded upon her during those silent hours. Ruth saw it, but did not know whence it came. She was subdued by it, subdued too by the sad scene; it was worse than she had expected.

“Ought you to stay?” she asked. “Surely Martha could do it alone; she used to do this sort of thing for Aunt Gracey.”

“I like to,” she answered. “But it’s sad for him,

Ruthie. It is always hard to be ill, and to have no one you care for near. A little boy has been in once, and he says he is his only friend; but I fancied I heard him call for a Jack something. I wondered if it was that bright boy we saw at your brother's room."

Sam moved, and Dorothy knelt down beside him, and raising his head, made him drink something from a cup. Ruth watched her. She looked older than she had seen her before, and that quiet, almost sad look round her lips was new. It suited her, Ruth thought, and made her look prettier than usual. She turned back again as Sam closed his eyes and seemed inclined to doze again.

"How do you know what to do?" Ruth asked. "How did you learn?"

"I have had several lessons," she answered; and Ruth understood and asked no more, and Dorothy went on—"Can you go and read to Aunt Gracey?"

"I wish I could; but I am engaged this afternoon. I could not tell, you know."

"Of course not; but you will keep your promise and go to the boys this evening. Mr. Carden will be tired, and if he intends to be here again through the night, should rest."

"It is too bad of me, I know, Dolly; but I forgot, and have made another engagement for to-night."

Dorothy did not answer, but drew out her watch. "I think I could go back to the cottage for a little.

I should only stay here because I wanted to. He will sleep on, and Martha can give him his medicine at three."

She put on her things at once, and they walked away together, and Dorothy turned the conversation away from herself and Sam; and when she had left Ruth and reached the cottage, she was as bright as usual. Miss Gracey understood her too well not to take her return as a matter of course. She said she had come to read, so she let her get the book, and read for half an hour; and then, hardly knowing how it came to pass, they found it laid aside, and Dorothy was seated in a low chair by Miss Gracey's side telling her everything.

"They all want *you* so," she said. "Martha keeps telling me of things you and she have done together; and your nephew said, in the old days he brought such cases to you."

"It was because I did such work that such work came to me. We make our own places in a large measure, and you will find it so," Miss Gracey replied.

"I am like a comet, floating about. I have no place," Dorothy answered.

"Even they have a path marked out for them," was the reply.

"I am not ungrateful, Miss Gracey," she answered. "I suppose I have, and some day I shall see it more clearly than I do now. Just at present I seem literally to have no place. I suppose my home is at

Uncle Joseph's; but there are so many girls, they do not *want* me there. I stay only because I must; and then, when town-life is past endurance, I go down into the country till all my friends there are tired of me; and then there is nothing but to begin it over again. I think I shall carry out my pet-idea soon and be a hospital nurse out in the country somewhere, where they would let me go out and nurse the people in their own homes. I am afraid no one would work with me though; I have never been taught to obey, and I cannot do it. I hate myself for it, but it is a fact. After I was left, there never was any one I really ought to obey, and because the wrong people tried, I grew self-willed; and now I am so bad, I am afraid nothing will cure me. I know you do not quite understand. You have been kind to me; you give me credit for much that is not really true. Mr. Carden will be making the same mistake; and I thought if I told you, you would tell him. I do everything because I like it, and for no other reason."

"So we are none of us to think you capable of any self-denial? I wonder what brought you back here this afternoon?"

Dorothy flushed a little. "I thought you might like to see me for an hour, and I wanted to come."

"Did you? And have you not been wondering if Sam has awoke and missed you? Was it not hard to attend to that long chapter, so as to be able to

talk about it as usual? You must be honest every way, if you claim to be honest at all."

"It was not hard really, Miss Gracey. I suppose it was through never knowing what might happen to me next, that I have got into the way of going straight on and doing the next thing without much thought of the one behind. I told you you thought me better than I was."

"O Aunt Gracey, *do* let her come and play tennis just a little bit. Frank can hardly play at all, and David won't. We have been here ever so long; do let her come!"

Hugh stood before them with his racket in his hand, and a very beseeching look on his round, honest little face.

"You will spare me for ten minutes, won't you? We have had a long talk, and I must go back in a quarter of an hour."

Miss Gracey saw her bright face as she rose, and gave her willing consent; and Hugh triumphantly carried her off to the old covered shed where they amused themselves on wet days, and across which the tennis-net was now stretched. Dorothy was as merry as the boy himself during the game, and the end of the ten minutes was a signal for loud lamentations.

"I shall not be late," she said, as she started for Bransdale again. "Martha and I will come home as soon as Mr. Carden sends Graham."

Miss Gracey begged her not to hurry on her account,

and the long afternoon was shortened for her, and the wet, depressing day brought to a bright close.

Dorothy went quickly back through the mist and mud, a little perplexed and a little doubtful, but just going on and waiting. Martha met her with a relieved expression.

"He's kept on asking for you, miss, and would hardly take his medicine," she said.

"Did you want me, Sam?" Dorothy asked, bending down.

"Yes, miss," he answered. "Shall you stay now?"

"A little while," she replied; "and then I must leave you again. But I will be with you when I can."

"When you can," he muttered, and kept opening his eyes to see if she were there.

When he had awoke that afternoon and found her vanished, he was afraid it might all be only a wonderful dream, and that presently everything else would disappear too. When first Dorothy came, and he felt her cool hand pushing back the tangled hair from his forehead, and presently heard the soft clipping of her scissors as she cut away the locks that would stray down into his eyes, a feeling of rest stole over him he had never known before. He had been glad and surprised to find Harry by his side; but when Dorothy came he was satisfied. His unexpressed wishes were realized; and the sense of being fed by her, the knowledge even that the old leaden spoon was laid

aside, that everything brought him was clean and fresh, had a peculiarly refining influence upon him. Sam revived as the afternoon passed away, and began to want to talk.

"Where's Tom?" he asked. "I shall want him to sing; he mustn't go away."

"Shall I sing?" Dorothy asked.

"Can you?" he asked eagerly; "like what they sings at Mr. Carden's room?"

"Yes," she answered; and immediately the words of the hymn they sung the night that she was there came back to her, and she began,—

"I was a wandering sheep."

"Does it mean anything?" Sam asked. "Could you tell it me?"

"Don't you know the story, Sam?" she answered. "It is in the Bible."

"No one ever troubled themselves to tell me nothing," he answered; and then Dorothy told it him, and using almost Harry's own words, tried to make the meaning clear.

"Is it the same One what looked for the sheep as Mr. Carden said was real poor and hungry, and knowed all about us, right Bransdale through?"

"Yes," she answered; and then, as she saw he was thinking, she sat quietly back in the one chair thinking too, and her thoughts had gone far away, when suddenly they were brought back by the sound of

soft, quick footsteps on the ladder, and for the second time that day Stevie's small face looked across from the trap-door.

"My! they have made a set-out," he soliloquized. "He looks like a king there, with a pillow and heverything. Much good they'll do him though; it would take more than them to fill up them hollows in his cheeks. It's like them rich folk though. Neither of them ladies would have spoke or looked at him, as they wouldn't me, so long as we's hall right; and now they're down on their knees on the floor a-feedin' of him like any baby. There's no room for me, that's certain. Guess that man'll come and stay all night again; and there's them pictures what I put up. Well, we've been comfor'ble enough. Poor old Sam! he don't look up to much."

Dorothy was watching his strange little face, and as he suddenly met her eyes she called softly to him, telling him to stay, and he obeyed.

"You are his friend," she said; "he knows you better than me. Sit by him a little; he will like to see you."

Stevie obeyed again, and Dorothy moved further away where she could not hear should they speak. So no one heard what Sam said to Stevie then—no one knew of this first effort to undo the wrong he had done the little lad.

"I learned it you all, Bony," he said when the little fellow moved to go; but he paid no heed to

the almost tender wistfulness of his tone, and only thought Sam was growing very soft.

"Come again," Dorothy said, crossing the loft; "come every day. You have done so much for him; you understand him better than we. Come often."

"Maybe I will when *you're* here," Stevie said a little bluffly, looking hard and cold, and not allowing his eyes to meet Dorothy's. Then he turned, slid down the ladder, and was gone; and he spent the evening in his old haunts just as careless, just as bold and daring as ever—and only eleven years old!

CHAPTER XXIV.

FRED DECIDES.

T seemed as though Sam's illness were to be the centre of a circle of troubles which in some way or another would touch each of the friends in Bransdale and bring some shadow, temporary or lasting, into their lives. Dorothy, Harry, Stevie, Tom had each felt the influence of the sad scenes they were witnessing; but the one who had been most bitterly wronged, the one who was suffering most at this moment, was Jack Carter.

His loss was great—great in itself to the country lad, and great because of all the hopes and plans centring round his savings—but the feeling of having been cruelly wronged was at first the most overpowering. He never had a doubt as to who the culprit was. It was true only the week before he had taken Fred into his confidence and told him the story of his acquaintance with Tom from beginning to end; but he had told no one else, and he felt sure no other had discovered his nightly resting-place or his secret hoard. Tom could be the only one who had done

this,—Tom whom he had trusted, whom he had defended vigorously when Fred warned him that sooner or later he would rue his kindness to the little fellow ; Tom whom he had cared for with the tenderness he had always showed his own little Robbie. It was hard,—hard to find he had misplaced his faith—that the child so docile sometimes, so wild at others, so refined in feeling, so untamed in manners, was, after all, untrue. In his anger and despair all around him at first seemed darkness. It was no good to try and help others, no good to try and assist his mother, no good to deny himself ; he had tried it, and in one night the result of all was swept away. Bitter thoughts, strong temptations surged through the boy's soul, and he had to stand alone and battle them out. He dared not mention his loss to his master or to his fellow-workmen, for that would reveal the liberty he had taken in sleeping in the shed and bring him into disgrace. He half shrank from telling Fred, fearful of his sarcasm and the scant sympathy he might expect after his warnings. He shrank, too, from telling Harry : he knew his disappointment in the little boy would be greater even than his own. So it was well, perhaps, that for the next few days he was obliged to work overtime, and so, whether he wished it or not, it was beyond his power to reach his friends.

Of course Tom never came near him. He did not expect it ; and he was surprised to find how much he

missed the little fellow. He was so accustomed to look up from his work and see his curly head looking in at the door ; so accustomed whenever he went out to hear soft steps by his side, and to look down and see that ragged little figure walking by him, that he missed it,—missed his constant chatter, his strange questions, his often merry, clever remarks, more than he would have thought possible. And thus gradually his anger towards the little fellow changed more into pity ; and yet it was hard, very hard to forgive him.

So Jack had to learn the bitter lesson of beginning again, and when pay-day came he put aside five shillings towards another pound less confidently, less happily than before. He left the shed altogether as a resting-place, and re-engaged his old room where first he had slept in Bransdale, and life for a time was grave and sad to him.

So the days went by. And Sam was being nursed by kind friends ; and little Tom was doing all he could for each and every one ; and Fred was saving every penny for the purpose he had in view ; and Jack was working early and late, kept apart from them all, but constantly following first one and then another in his thoughts.

“ Steady, boys, steady ;
We'll fight and we'll conquer again and again.”

Fred was lingering near the blacksmith's forge, half with the thought of going in to see Jack, when the familiar whistle and the familiar tune came out

to him in the darkness. They decided him, and he pushed the creaking door and went in. The smith looked round, but seeing who it was, took no notice, and Fred seated himself on an anvil to wait.

Presently a step was heard on the ladder. A young man came down with a lighted candle and went to a grindstone in the corner. In a minute Jack followed. The boys' eyes met through the gloom, and in the expression of each there was something new to the other. Jack's honest brown eyes looked wistful, almost sad. Fred's face was restless, unquiet; the half smile that unbent the firm curves of his lips had no pleasure in it, and Jack looked at him again as he finished turning the grindstone and went after his mate up the ladder again. Fred's eyes followed him, and almost unconsciously he contrasted the retreating figure with that that had met him on Bransdale Down. Town life had worn the healthy brown from Jack's cheeks, and his fair hair curled down over a white forehead and a face which was round no longer. He had grown rapidly; and though he had not lost his manly bearing, hardly his countrified appearance, there was a far less strong and sturdy air about him. Fred noticed all this, and thought about it as he waited. Presently he drew near the smith.

"It's late," he said.

"Nigh ten," replied the man, glancing up at the clock.

Then there was silence again, till from the loft

above they again heard that musical whistle, and the old air sounded soothingly in Fred's ears, and stilled his impatience.

At last the smith rose from his seat and shouted up the ladder, to tell the men to leave their work. They came down one by one and left without a word. Jack was the last, and as he passed his master he stopped to pick up for him a tool he dropped at the moment, and asked gently,—

“How is she to-night?”

“Worse,” he answered.

“Shall I fetch the little one to-morrow?”

“Ay, if you will; she's always a-beggin' to come.”

“Have you turned nurse?” Fred asked dryly as they closed the door and left the man still working on alone.

“Not quite,” he answered; “but his missus is ill and won't never be better, and he brought the little one down one day, and she had a fine time along of us chaps. She's but a bit of a child, and I look after her and see she don't get any harm. She reminds me of Robbie the way she runs about and gets to know all about everything. It pleases the master to see her; and when I saw the missus one day she said something that made me know how glad she was they should be together.”

“Well, you're a fool, Jack, that's all. You let this man work you overtime every day; you let him underpay you, and then you look after his babies and

go on just as though you owed him some favour, instead of treating him as a regular tyrant, as he is."

"I may please myself, I suppose?" Jack said, feeling disinclined to argue. "And he has been good to me. He took me without a character or anything."

"Oh yes, certainly; only he's got more work out of you than he would out of two Bransdale men. But of course you can please yourself."

Jack hardly understood Fred that evening, and he waited in vain for him to sober down so that he might tell of his loss. He was in one of his most contrary moods, and yet talked incessantly and rapidly. He seemed to have something on his mind, —something he wished yet feared to disclose, and he dropped mysterious hints, and seemed in every way to be wishing to prepare Jack for something, and only managed fairly to puzzle him. He suddenly told him all about going to Bransdale Church, and laughed so bitterly at Jack because he still stood up for the preacher that he silenced him. He brought up Jim's name, and in an abrupt way asked Jack to be kind to him. He referred to his Aunt Susan, and what he had tried quietly but unceasingly to do for her and her children. He seemed to hint at some great trouble at home, and then turned quickly from the subject and almost abused Harry and young Mr. Langton.

Jack grew fairly bewildered. If his own affairs had not so largely been occupying his thoughts, he

would surely have understood something of the meaning of it all; but as it was, he then thought only that Fred was cross at having been kept waiting, and this was to ease his feelings.

So he waited and listened, and by-and-by tired out, asked, "Fred, what is the matter with you?"

This brought him to a standstill, brought him to himself, and he entirely changed his manner as he answered earnestly,—

"Jack, do you think folks are ever driven to do things they would hate themselves for—do you think there is ever anything in them driving them to it?"

"What do you mean?" he answered. "No; folks can do as they like. What are you doing? What have you done?"

"You'll know soon enough," he answered. "There, I'm a fool to have told you anything. I'll see you to the forge and go."

"I'm not sleeping there now," Jack answered, and then briefly, sadly told the tale of his loss.

The bitter words against Tom that he had expected did not come, however; the earnest sympathy he might have looked for was not expressed.

"You are quite sure he took it, I suppose?" he asked.

"Who else could?" was the answer.

"And you have been after him—you have tracked him?"

"No. How could I?"

A few more questions and answers followed, and then Fred abruptly turned to go. He stayed a minute, however, and before they parted said, without a shadow of the constraint that seemed to have rested over him hitherto,—

“Jack, I am awfully sorry for you.”

Jack looked at him, and in those eyes, that had never met his with anything but full confidence, there was still a shadow of his late perplexity. Fred misconstrued it into doubt, turned from him, and went rapidly away.

The reason of his almost silence after Jack's disclosure was that he was debating with himself between his impulsive wish to help his friend and his duty. He, too, had worked early and late through these past weeks; he, too, had been carefully saving, and had almost attained the sum at which he was aiming. Directly, therefore, he heard Jack's tale, the wish came into his heart to make over to him the sum he had thus acquired, to make him take it as a loan if not as a gift, so that he might have something to send his mother at once. He wanted at once to tell him this, yet could not quite make up his mind if it were wise and well; and thus he wore a pre-occupied air when Jack looked for sympathy, and gave confused answers to his questions when he wanted advice. He decided he would wait till he next received his wages; and having decided, turned at once to leave. It was then he felt that he had

not shown one-half how really sorry he was, and spoke those few words in his most hearty, cordial way. It was then, too, he saw what he took for a look of doubt in Jack's eyes, and before that his resolution wavered; before the remembrance of it during the next two days it fell and disappeared. If people chose to harbour young thieves they must take the consequences. So argued Fred to himself, and he turned from the unformed purpose to a task that was harder still.

A few days afterwards, Fred counted out his savings, put them in his pocket, took the hateful ticket in his hand, and turned towards the pawn-shop to redeem his mother's shawl. He went when it was late, when he felt he could go unobserved, though it hurt his pride almost as much to see himself go as that others should see him, and his young spirit chafed at the task he had set himself. He passed through the door, and stood side by side with a man who was passing his little child's boots across the counter that he might have a few more pence to spend in drink. Fred waited till he was gone, then threw down the ticket, and asked how much there was to pay. The man mentioned a sum larger than he had expected. The shawl had been there long, and the interest had accumulated. He snatched up the ticket again, and turned away. For a moment he paused outside, hesitating whether to go home again or not. As he did so, quick footsteps came

down the street, and looking up he saw Jack drawing rapidly near. Never pausing to think if it were wise or well, he sprang towards him. He forgot all about his loss—forgot about their last parting; and Jack paused, forgetting too, and looking wild and out of breath.

“Could you lend me five shillings?” he asked, naming a sum far larger than he required.

Jack thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out two half-crowns. They were all that he had yet set aside for his mother, but he laid them unhesitatingly in Fred’s hand, feeling them as safe there as in his own pocket.

“Could you stay and come with me?” Fred asked, for the sight of Jack’s face made him feel he wanted him.

“Sam’s sent for me; I must go,” Jack answered, still out of breath. “I’m sorry, but they say he wants me,” and he started off, running again, and was soon out of sight.

Fred did not know Sam was ill; he did not know that the lad he had always regarded with an angry contempt was dying, and he let the old bitter feeling of jealousy pass through him. He turned back into the shop, gave the money, and took up his mother’s shawl, and walked back through the streets with rapid step. The house was empty, save for his mother. He knew it would be; and he walked straight in, never stopping to think what to say.

Mrs. Fraser was moving about preparing supper. Fred went straight up to her, and laid the shawl on the table.

"Mother," he said, "this is yours. I have brought it from White's. I found the ticket, and now I have redeemed it."

Could nothing tell her that on her answer hung her boy's future; that it could make or ruin him? There was silence while she looked up at him with frightened, questioning eyes, cowed by his hard, almost authoritative air.

Then he altered his tone. She and he were alone perhaps for the last time in their lives. He had made this effort to save her. He wanted to do her good.

"Mother," he went on, "think back to the time when we were children—when we were happy. Think of little Willie killed by uncle; think of aunt going the same way. Mother, why will you drag yourself down to disgrace? I know it was for drink you pawned your shawl. The neighbours are all beginning to talk. It ruins us all as well as you. I have done what I can: I have saved my money; I have freed you from the pawnbroker. But there must be some change. I cannot stay here and see things going just the same; I cannot have this work over again. Say you will never pawn your things again; say you won't drink."

It was his tone, his voice, his whole attitude that showed how earnest he was far more than his words.

There was a gentle firmness about them; there was an undertone of the love he still bore that mother. But she had passed beyond such influences, and her shrill voice rang through the room in angry passion:—

“For drink! You dare stand in my house and say I pawned the shawl my father gave me for drink, when every penny went to pay the rent. You dare come here and preach to me!”

Loud accusing words, they were poured forth in an unending torrent, and Fred listened. He saw her take the shawl and toss it passionately into a corner. Then he turned. He gave one hasty look round the room, a half-unconscious good-bye to familiar surroundings. Then the door closed, and it was thus they parted, mother and son.

It took him only a few minutes to roll up into a bundle the few things he possessed, stowing away amongst them the little Testament that so long had lain neglected on his shelf; and then he passed out of the house without a farewell, without one good wish to follow him.

“No one can send me back now,” he muttered,—“no one,” thinking of the day when Harry had met him and sent him back to the hard life he had lived since.

He pushed back the hair from his forehead. What should he do? It was too late to go then and carry out the only plan definitely before him. He would walk the streets the night through, and say a sort of silent good-bye to all that had been familiar so long.

He would go down and see his aunt again; he would stand once more by little Willie's grave; he would see Jack once more, and pay him back the money he had borrowed. His aunt owed him more than that, but he would only ask so much from her to-night.

He went down the footpath and across the bridge. "Killed by drink, little Willie, and I driven from home by it too. Ah, child, I would have stayed for you; I would have borne it all to keep you from growing hard and heartless." Some such thought passed through his mind, and up before him rose unbidden the picture on the wall at home. "There arose a great storm." It seemed still a time of toiling with the waves with him. No one had risen yet and driven back the billows of doubt and disappointment, saying, "Peace, be still." Don't condemn him if against such thoughts he hardened himself yet more. Look at him, young, strong, vigorous, with a love of life and an energy to live and enjoy life few town lads possess. Look at the possibilities within him—the power to deny and to control himself, the power to think of and do alone a noble thing. Think of all that was great in him, reaching out for something to guide, something to encourage; and see the disappointment, the failure of his life. Stand beside him for a moment on the bridge, look at life as it looked to him, and then say what course he should pursue. He was alone, alone standing above the darkly-flowing waters, alone under the dark calm sky. Then he

passed over the bridge, and a new life lay before him. All thought of return was laid aside. He ran no more, but walked slowly, and his face was very grave as he entered his aunt's door. He saw at once she was in a different frame of mind to what he had known for a long time. She looked up, saw the bundle he carried, saw the look on his face, and knew what he was doing.

"Fred?" she said.

"I am late," he replied; and then in answer to her look, "I have stayed at home too long, I think."

He did not speak in a tone she could argue with, and besides she did not wonder. She knew as well as he the sadness of his home.

"I shall miss you," she answered, "and so will the children."

"Oh, not now," he replied. "You would, if Willie had been here;" and then he went on, "Will you look after Jim a little bit? he's a good little chap. I should not like him to grow like the others. Perhaps I had better tell you all," and he went through that night's events, half with the thought it might do her good. "I only told you so that you might know. It wasn't her real self; that is gone. You knew her once long ago, Aunt Susan."

The tone of his voice gave the application of it all. Then he pushed away his chair. "I should like just to see the children."

"She is like Willie," he said, bending down over the

youngest; and then the thought passed through him, "Will she grow up to bear what I am bearing? Will she be driven from home, as I am being driven?" He bent down and gently touched the little hand. The rosy fingers unconsciously clasped his.

"Good-bye, little Clara," he murmured, and he touched with his lips the tiny hand encircling his. Then he moved away. He did not sit down again, but silently took his bundle and prepared to move. Then Mrs. Fraser spoke.

"Fred," she said, "I was cold to you and angry with you the night you first spoke about it. But the words you spoke to me never left me. I never touched the drink but your voice sounded in my ear, saying, 'It is hard on little Willie.' I tried taking more to drown it, till I grew ashamed of myself, and now I have taken again the vow I took by his side. I and the children will touch it no more. And, Fred, you have done it. The sight of your bringing them home when I was not fit to see after them myself, seeing you come and amuse them and talk to them as usual—your care for them—your kindness to me—melted me. And you have done more than you thought; for I had not begun to think like this a week when one day I saw the dog coming down the road, and a gentleman stopped at the door. He said you had told him about me; and he seemed to know all about everything, and said how sorry he was he had not been before. But it

seemed to me he came just at the right time. It makes a world of difference to have some one to help you like that. He told me about a sort of class they have at a room of his, and I went there on Wednesday, and a nice lady to be sure it was that took it. I felt right comfortable, I can tell you. And only yesterday he was in again, just to see how we were getting on. Your uncle was at home, and you should have heard how he talked to him. He liked him finely, and I can't help thinking perhaps some day he'll take a turn. All the world looks different, Fred; and it's all what you have done for Willie's sake."

"Is it?" he said, hardly so brightly as she would have thought he would have answered; but the contrast between the path made easy for her and the one he trod so painfully struck him. "It is a good thing I did turn back before then. I am glad, I am very glad."

"He asked after you; he seemed to want to see you."

"Did he?" Fred answered. "Tell him I am gone." Then he paused, while they arranged their money matters. Mrs. Fraser had only six shillings in the house, and that she handed over to him, promising that Jim should have the rest.

Then Fred held out his hand, said good-bye, then turned, and lingered.

"Tell Mr. Carden when he comes again—or rather

ask him to tell the little boy, he was right. I am going to be a soldier!"

He faintly heard her exclamation, dimly saw her look of horror, and was gone.

Where he went, what he saw, and what he did that night he hardly knew himself; he seemed only thoroughly to awake when at eight o'clock the next morning he held the Queen's shilling in his hand and knew that his fate was decided. He was dimly conscious of rough jeering words amongst those by whom he was surrounded, because he would accept nothing from them in the public-house nor treat them to anything. He felt a sort of sickening contempt for those who listened so eagerly to the recruiting sergeant's overdrawn stories, and he was glad when, giving his word to be back at eight that evening, he was allowed to go free. He went straight away to the forge to repay the money he owed Jack, and he lingered watching and asking for him there; but for the first time Jack had absented himself from work, and though Fred came and came again the day passed without his seeing him. He did not know what to do; he and others were to sleep in barracks that night, and he must pay that debt.

"With Sam,"—the thought took hold of him; "he must be with Sam. Surely not helping him in any of his dark work, but perhaps through him led into some scrape, perhaps mixed up with some fray or

quarrel, and in prison." Yes, hard thoughts were filling his mind, hard thoughts of the boy he had met on Bransdale Down, of the only one who had ever consciously influenced him for good. Six o'clock came, and Fred roamed the streets still seeking; he did not know to whom to trust the money to give it. Seven o'clock passed. It was almost dark; he must give it up. He buttoned his coat and turned slowly back again, but he had not walked far when something brushed against him. He looked down and saw Roslyn's black shaggy coat. There was evidently no one with him, and he paused as Fred patted and spoke to him. The world suddenly seemed less friendless than before, and for the sake of having some companion he followed the dog. They passed through street after street, and then, without pausing, the dog went straight up the stairs of an old house. Fred felt curious and followed, up, up till the topmost landing was reached, and a ladder led from thence to a loft above. The dog laid himself down there. Fred was about to proceed up the ladder, but as he placed his foot upon the first rung he paused. There were voices above, voices which, though hushed and subdued, he recognized.

"Has he gone?" Sam asked.

"Yes; I have sent him home to rest. He was here all night as well as all to-day."

"I've summat I want to say about him then. He's been better to me nor I to 'im, Jack has—jist from

the very fust day as ever I saw 'im. 'Twas all along on 'im as any good thoughts ever comed in my 'ead at all. He jist seemed like to do hanything to keep a chap from going wrong. He tooked me to his lodgin' one night clean out of a public-house, and gave up his bed to me, and hall. He'd come and walk about with me and not care who saw him. He'd talk till I felt reg'lar soft, and often enough wished I was a better sort of chap. He weren't one bit stuck up. And I wasn't one bit good to 'im. He was awfully took with young Fraser, and I couldn't abear it. He hates me, and I thought maybe he'd learn Jack to do the same. Steve and me we jist did all we could to make them hate each other. We told lies fust to one and then t'other, till Fraser thought Jack was a reg'lar drinking, swearing sort of chap, always goin' down to the music 'alls and such like 'long of us, and Jack thought Fred was tired of 'im and a bit too high and mighty. It weren't right, were it?"

And then there came a long fit of coughing, and in the pause Fred saw the injustice of his thoughts and conduct towards his friend. He saw Jack nobly fighting the evil of his life hand-in-hand with Sam; he saw himself standing scornfully aside, unwilling to believe any good possible amidst so much bad. A sudden consciousness of how Jack's heart must have been wounded, how lonely he had often left him, swept across him, for he knew Jack was still loyal and true; he knew, in spite of his own variableness,

Jack had kept faithful, and that the country boy still loved him best. It all flashed across him, and the friend he had wronged in thought and in deed stood out again before him one among a thousand—true when lies were being whispered into his ear, pure and honest in that corrupt town. He might have trusted, might have known. But now it was too late; no words of explanation, no good-bye could ever be spoken between them. It was bitter; yet less bitter than the feeling Jack had done him wrong.

“Yes, Sam, it was wrong. It did you no good, and both of them harm.”

“I knowed it was. That young lady said the other day that if there was any one as I should make better by seeing I had better try; for it was a pity to go away and leave things wrong I might make straight. I thought maybe you’d bring him to me.”

“Bring Fred? Yes, gladly. I have wanted much to see him too. He will not come to me, however, but Jack could bring him.”

“It’s queer now, isn’t it?” Sam went on, “how different things do look when you think of them ‘long of yersel’, and when other folks put them round straight for yer? If I’d a chance, I guess I’d try and be summat like Jack. There ain’t nobody in all the world except myself as knows how good he can be. He’ll be glad if Fred makes it up. But do you think he will come?”

Fred's impatient feet were preparing to spring up the ladder. He was ready to stand by the dying boy and say, "I am here, I have come; and I am sorry too, more sorry than you, Sam, for the harm we have done one another." But as he moved forward a clock near chimed a quarter to eight. He was another's, not his own, and not daring to stay another minute, he turned and fled. He darted down the stairs and along the street, and then he stopped. A small ragged figure confronted him, his hands in his pockets, carelessly whistling some cheerful air.

It was his last chance, and though he knew him to be untrustworthy he felt he must trust him.

"Stevie," he said, "Sam's ill, you know, and Jack Carter is coming back to him to-morrow. Give him these five shillings. I borrowed them of him, and have hunted the town over to find him. Tell him so, and tell him I've enlisted. There, there's a shilling for yourself, and mind you do it."

Fred's voice felt choking and uncomfortable, and he dropped the coins into the small hand that grasped them so eagerly, and sped onward.

Half an hour afterwards a train was speeding away through the darkness. In a third-class compartment six men, or rather youths, were seated. Five were noisily singing song after song; one, the youngest, was sitting silent. He was leaning his head against the window, looking out at the lights that twinkled and disappeared in the distance. Bitter, remorseful

thoughts were coursing through his brain, and he suffered them to do so for awhile, then gathered all his strength and forced them into silence. He had chosen his path, and he would go forward into it, so he shook himself as free as it was possible to do from his past. Fred Fraser was left behind to the memory of those who had known him in Bransdale, and it was as Frederick Bernard, private No. 1107 of the —th regiment, that he was welcomed into the army.

CHAPTER XXV.

THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW.

“ILL he come, do you think?”

“Who, Sam? I did not know you were expecting any one.”

“Fred,” was the answer.

“The doctor thought it better not. Mr. Carden asked me to tell you. I am sorry. I will give him any message.”

A look of impatience passed over the suffering lad's face.

“Do *you* think better not?” he asked.

“I think you are very tired,” Dorothy answered. “I will do my best to tell him; will that satisfy you?”

He nodded, and closed his eyes. He was so weak, so weary, so really ill, that it was seldom they spoke much to him or he to them. Silently they marked the rapid decrease of his strength, and the watchers felt they would not be needed to watch much longer. Harry and Graham sat with him alternate nights, whilst Dorothy and her faithful attendant spent many hours there each day. And Sam grew accus-

tomed to their presence, and to the cleanliness and order of the still bare desolate room. The old wan look seemed passing from his face, and a gentler, more peaceful expression was growing there; his words were more refined, his tones less harsh. It is true, in his weakness he was often irritable. Never having been accustomed to control himself at all, he had no power to do so now, and he often tried the patience of his friends. But in Dorothy's presence he always made what effort he could, and it was touching to see his sorrow if he failed and grieved her in any way.

Almost every afternoon he would ask her to sing to him, and she would try sometimes and make things plain to him. It was then she gradually discovered how absolutely ignorant he was. Everything was new to him, and it was difficult to find words simple enough in which to talk to him.

Stevie often came in in the afternoon.

"We don't want to drive you away. We only want to help you to nurse him," Dorothy said one day when the little fellow gave her a chance to speak to him. "Everything is yours by right, and he cares for you more than for us."

Stevie did not respond to the kindness of her tone and words, but after that he came more often, and would take a seat anywhere, often coming and going and speaking no word all the time; and she learned, if she did not want to drive him away, she must keep

silence towards him. He was sitting near them when Sam asked for Fred ; but his hard little face showed no sign of the knowledge he possessed.

He was still there when, after a long silence, Sam looked up and said,—

“Miss, it do seem as though I were too tired to think ; just what likes comes into my head and goes out again.”

“We know you are,” she answered, “so do not try. Let me sing to you a little, and you shall try and go to sleep.”

She sang—

“Come unto me, ye weary,
And I will give you rest.
O blessed voice of Jesus,
Which comes to hearts oppressed !”

There was another long silence when she had finished, and they thought Sam was asleep ; but he opened his eyes presently, and she drew nearer to hear the words that came so faintly now.

“Miss,” he said, “I’ve never forgotten that what you told me the first day about the Shepherd and the sheep what went away. Seems like as if I saw it all before me. Would you tell me again, the bit about the finding it ?”

So she told it again. “It was so wounded with its wandering, so weary, so weak, it could never have found its own way back ; and when the Shepherd found it he saw all that, and so he took it up just as it was and carried it.”

He stopped her there. "That's it," he said. "I like that better nor the son that went away from his father's home. He had to make his own way back and tell all what he'd been up to. I guess I'm more like t'other one; and since I've thought that, and it seemed as though he really knew all, and was looking down on it, and being sorry like I was so bad, I feels inside just like what I did outside when you comed here. I wish I'd known it afore. I know I told Mr. Carden I would try my own way first; but it does seem mean never to have cared anything about it all till I was too bad to care for anything else. But He ain't like other folk, you say; He don't get tired, and He don't mind if we is all tired out when we stops our wanderin' and looks round and wishes He'd come. Would you say that hymn again, miss, just so that I could hear every word?"

Dorothy repeated it very slowly, raising her voice a little; for though his mind was clearer and more active that afternoon, his powers were rapidly failing.

"Thank you," he said, and then looked wistfully across at Stevie. The little fellow was obliged to respond, and drew near unwillingly.

Dorothy drew back, and no one ever heard or knew what the last words were that the dying boy spoke to his faithful little follower.

She had heard Harry's step. She knew he was waiting behind. He had come in a minute or two after Sam had asked her to sing, and Dorothy had

resisted the impulse to leave as usual. She saw the lad wanted her, and all thought of self was laid aside in her earnest desire to give to him what he was wanting. It was very seldom that they had met in the work they were sharing. Harry was at the bank before Dorothy came in the mornings, and she had returned home before he came for his evening visit. From Sam's constant reference to her he had learned to see that she had won the boy's heart entirely; but he had not known till that moment how tenderly, how unselfishly she had cared for him. There was no attempt to conceal her feelings as she turned towards Harry.

"He is worse," she said, "he is—"

"Dying." They both filled in the unuttered word, but neither spoke it.

"It is so sad he should have no one that cares to come and see him; no one he loves," she went on.

"I hardly think he feels that as much as you would think," Harry answered.

"Don't you?" she said quickly; "don't you think there is something in him telling him he has not what most have?"

"I think that feeling is satisfied. You only see him when you are here, Miss Dorian; you know nothing of the eager watching for you, the sudden calming of his restlessness when you come."

"Of course I have tried to be kind to him," she answered, "but there was so little to do. I think

your way is best: it is harder to help people to live than to die. It is harder work to bear with their heartlessness than weakness such as Sam's. But still it is sad enough for him."

"Sad for us to watch him going. But you did not finish your story, I think, Miss Dorian."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"He carried it home rejoicing."

There was a slight movement at the end of the loft. Stevie caught sight of Harry, slid down the ladder, and was gone.

Dorothy went across to Sam.

"We will do what we can for him," she said; and then added, "I must go too now, Sam."

"Must you?" he answered, for the first time showing any wish to detain her. "You have been so good to me. I am glad I told you. I thought you would like to know, and I think I am too tired to go on much longer."

She put down her hand over his, but he was too weak to take it.

"Don't talk about that, Sam; I have been so glad to be here and to help you."

He looked up at her earnestly and gratefully, and his lips moved as though he would speak again, and then tears he could not control ran down his wan cheeks. Dorothy was touched at his distress. She seemed to have done so little to have won so sincere affection, and to be unworthy such sorrow.

"Dear boy," she said, "I wish there was some one else I could send you.—Do you think I might stay?" she added, looking round at Harry. But before he could say no, she saw herself she could not, and laid aside the wish.

"Miss Gracey will want me ; I must go."

"Good-bye, Sam ; you will be better in the morning. I will come early," she said when he was calmer.

He looked at her again long and earnestly.

"Good-bye," he whispered, and then she heard, half in a sigh of weariness as he turned his head away, "God bless you."

She went, and the long hours rolled slowly by. Graham came down, and Jack joined them soon after ; but though they roused Sam now and again to give him nourishment, he took no further notice of any one or of anything.

Only once he seemed to come back to consciousness, and, gathering all his failing strength, he said, "Jack." The boy was with him directly, kneeling down by his side and taking his hand.

But Sam's eyes closed again, after one look of recognition and satisfaction ; and though they watched and waited, he never moved or spoke again, and before the morning dawned those who had cared for the boy so tenderly knew he needed their care no longer.

CHAPTER XXVI.

GONE.

“OU will be better in the morning.” Dorothy had believed the words as she had spoken them ; she had seen him almost as weak as that before ; and she was wakeful and restless through the night, planning how to cheer more successfully the lonely lad for whom she was so sorry, how to soothe him better through long hours of restlessness.

She was fulfilling her promise to go early, and was just walking down to the garden gate, when she heard Harry’s step, and she knew at once what he had come to tell.

She never wondered that she, who had told Harry on the first day they met how little she believed in the result of work such as his, should have learned to believe in it so quickly. It did not strike her as strange that she should feel a sense of loss because a boy that had been a thief, was degraded, sin-stained, hardened, had died that day. It seemed natural that she should, and the few questions that

she asked showed how much she was thinking of the others. If it was any reward to her for what she had done to know that Sam's only farewell and parting words had been spoken to her, she did not show it.

"You really did everything for him," she said, "you and Jack, because you were friends to him when he did not want you."

Harry would not come in, and did not stay long; and to all who had lately given their spare time to nursing and caring for Sam the day seemed to pass slowly. It was difficult to disengage their thoughts from what had been so occupying them lately, difficult to realize Sam really needed them no more; and perhaps underneath there was a little regret that a common interest was gone, that there was nothing now calling for their united effort.

Dorothy stood in the porch for a few minutes after Harry had left, looking as though she were resolutely facing and mastering something.

Then she went in, and up to Miss Gracey.

"You are sorry, dear," she answered. "I can remember just how I felt the first time I lost one I had cared for as you have done for this boy."

"I ought not to be; it is better for him," she answered.

"Some one that cared for you has gone out of your life, and we always miss that. He had neither father, mother, brothers, nor any one, and he gave you the

trust and the affection that naturally would have been theirs."

"I am like him in that," she answered. "Miss Gracey, do you think—" and she broke off, and turned the subject. Not to-day, not just yet would she disclose a plan long floating, now forming in her mind.

A few hours after and she was watching over a party of boys on the river. The little brothers and some cousins had come to beg for the treat of a row in Miss Gracey's boat; and it needed all Dorothy's powers of rule and management to keep the somewhat perilous voyage from ending disastrously. It was wonderful the amount of things she managed to get through, and yet how constantly she was with Miss Gracey. Never all the time Sam was ill had she been absent at the hours when she knew she liked to be read to. She laughed at the idea of the long walk being too much twice a day, and so timed her going and coming her absences seemed short. The boys were devoted to her, and got endless work out of her in the way of tennis and walking; whilst Ruth found no reason to be jealous of others, for Dorothy never failed to reserve a little time for her."

And yet she was never what could be called busy; there was not the least air of being too occupied about her, nothing to prevent any one from asking her to do anything for them, and they always found her ready.

Ruth wondered at her that day. She knew all that had happened, knew even that Dorothy had had little sleep at night. She saw her come in bright and animated from the river, watched her presiding over the large party at dinner, amusing them all, and yet keeping the young voices sufficiently under control not to annoy Miss Gracey.

Then when they were all turned loose in the garden she wrote letters at Miss Gracey's dictation for an hour; and when Ruth then offered to read she turned gladly to a painting she was anxious to get done. It was then the really trying time began. Every few minutes she was interrupted by first one small boy and then another. Several times she had to break off and go out to settle some dispute; then there were callers; then the children's tea; and finally the sketch was replaced in the portfolio much as it came out.

"Isn't your patience nearly worn out?" Ruth asked.

"It is almost threadbare. I wish it were better material."

"Dolly, I can't think how you do all you do, and how you do. I am sure I never shall be able."

"Nonsense, Ruthie. Don't you know I have a most hateful propensity for managing everybody, and I enjoy tyrannizing even over these small folk?"

Miss Gracey heard the words, and smiled. Dorothy had a wonderful way of making people believe she did everything for her own pleasure.

Ruth believed her then ; but nevertheless Dorothy's influence stirred her up, and for a time she went beyond her many dreams and thoughts and wishes, and was more active, more unselfish.

The day that passed so busily with Dorothy went by more slowly with others with whom she had lately been associated, and on one a double share of sorrow came.

Jack Carter went to his work with a real conscious pain in his heart. He had cared very much for Sam ; he had looked for him, searched and inquired for him ever since he came out of prison ; and then, only four days ago, had been hurried into his presence to find him dying.

It was Harry who discovered how Sam was pining for a sight of him, and yet was held back from any further expression of his wish by the cruel lie Stephen had coined. Harry had felt sure it was untrue ; and Sam too felt sure it was untrue when he saw his honest, truthful eyes looking into his, and heard his warm words of greeting, and saw his sorrow. So nothing was said, and they let it die from their memories. For two nights and a day Jack hardly left him, and during the two that followed he was in and out every spare hour. They did not speak much, but Sam's eyes would follow Jack about, and every time he came to sit with him some little word would tell how glad he was.

Now and then Sam would recall to him different

ways in which he had helped him ; and as Jack saw more and more of the strange affection this rough wild lad had given him from the very first, he felt more and more thankful he had been his friend, and resolved to try harder to do for others what he had done for him.

And now he was gone. He had spoken his name with his last breath, and with his hand in his had passed through the valley of the shadow. The sense of loss pressed heavily, and he worked with such wandering thoughts that for the first time sharp words from his master roused him.

"Jack's solly. What's Jack solly about?" A tiny little figure in a pink print frock, with dark hair curling round her rosy cheeks, stood before him. She looked wonderfully pure and white in the midst of the dirt and the dust of the forge ; but her little feet danced lightly over the black floor, and two tiny white arms took hold of Jack, unheeding the blackened state of his working clothes.

"Jack's lost something," he answered, looking down on the winning child.

"Then Nellie's come to find it," she said.

"Nellie can't," he answered.

"Was it somefing very nice? Can't Nellie get anudder?" she asked.

"No," he answered ; "Jack has lost a friend."

"Nellie's your little fwend," said the child innocently. "Mother said so."

"Are you, dear?" he replied; and then turned to his work again, while she ran about and played as usual, carefully watched by Jack, but never getting in his way. Of course she could not understand, but the idea stayed in her mind, and presently she asked—

"Where's your nudder fwend?"

"Fred, do you mean? I don't know."

"Does you want him?"

"Very much."

Yes, more than he could say. Those four days, so full of strange scenes and events, made the last time he had seen him seem very far away. He wondered he had not been there to return the money. Some one had told him he had been the day he had stayed with Jack. He thought he would have come again, so he looked for him through the day. He knew though he was passionate and prejudiced he was just, and that when he heard Sam was dead, that the boy he had hated had been worn by suffering and disease, when he told him the tale of the little brothers' care of him, he would give just the sympathy and interest he needed.

But of course Jack was disappointed, and by-and-by he became conscious he had not seen Nellie for some time.

"Did you take her home, sir?" he asked, and the smith, looking anxiously up, answered, "No."

Jack volunteered to see if she had wandered home;

but she was not there, and without telling the invalid mother what his errand was, he turned out into the streets to search for her. He had not to look very far. Down one of the streets he caught sight of the little pink frock and white pinafore, and saw Nellie sobbing, holding on to the gloved finger of a tall policeman.

It was evident she had been unable to give any explanation of her belongings, and he was taking her off to the station till claimed. The child's cry of delight at Jack's appearance proclaimed him at once her rightful owner; and when her sobs were less and her fear passed, she explained, "I wanted to find Jack's nudder friend, I did; 'cause he's solly."

Innocent child! She might look far for him, and so might Jack; but she had done her best, and he carried her home, feeling her a little comforter in his sorrow.

Then when work was over he let his feet carry him to Fred's home to find him, feeling more and more what rest and comfort the sight of his face would bring him.

The door was opened noiselessly as he ascended the steps, and Jim beckoned him in.

"Hush! don't let them see you. Come in."

He followed the boy upstairs with swift steps. He sat down on the edge of the bed, and asked—

"What is it, Jim? Where's Fred?"

"Don't you know? I thought you would have

come to tell us something. I thought he would have been sure to tell you. He's gone."

"Gone!" How many times that word had passed his lips that day as one and another asked after Sam. "He is gone," he had replied; and now it was being used to him of another. What did it mean? How—where had his friend gone?

"They say he's 'listed. He told Aunt Susan he was going to, and she was the last as saw him. I didn't think he'd really do it; and nobody's sorry—they're only angry. Father's wild, and says he shall never come here again. Annie and Emma can't say enough bad about him; and I can't make mother out. I think maybe they had a row. Don't you know anything? Had *you* quarrelled? Something must have driven him away."

Jack heard, but heard more as in a dream. "Gone for a soldier." That meant gone for years, till they were men—changed, altered, grown apart. Everything in which Fred had grieved and disappointed him faded away. His bright smile of greeting; their long walks and talks; the confidence they had placed in each other; all the brighter, happier parts came back;—and then the sense it was all over—gone! Both in one day,—the boy he had loved and the one he had striven to help; the two that had crossed his path the first day he entered Bransdale; the two who had ever since occupied more of his time and thought than any other.

It was overwhelming—overpowering. Jack rested his head down upon his hands, trying to grasp it, and all that he seemed to hear was Fred's voice ringing in his ears as last he had heard it, "Could you stay and come with me?" And all that he saw was Fred's eager, anxious face, looking worn but resolute, as it had done that evening.

Jim fidgeted, but there was silence still. Silence; for out of the chaos of thought the remembrance of the five shillings was coming unpleasantly to the foreground. Silence; for another thought was beginning to take form, and though Jack put it from him it reasserted itself.

He had met little Tom by Sam's bedside, and the child's bright smile of welcome had quite taken Jack aback. He had come up to him with all the old confidence, and told every detail of his doings since his disappearance so simply Jack's suspicions had almost taken flight. He had tried the boy in one or two ways, had cross-questioned him, and then finally decided he could not be the thief. Then who was? The thought had haunted him already; it came back to him now. Fred was the only other one that knew. Why had he not been surprised when he told him? Why had he not been sympathetic? Why all those mysterious hints? "You will know soon enough," he had said. Was this what he meant? Had he found himself in sudden and sore need, and done this thing? Again Jack saw the bright, proud face, the indepen-

dent, half-scornful air. Was it all a delusion? Had he been deceived in the friend he had chosen? They were bitter, very bitter thoughts. He hated himself for allowing them passage through his brain; and yet they would come, each time more distinctly, each time with fresh proof. Very fiercely did the conflict rage; and when he raised his head at last, his face was perfectly colourless, and there were dark rings round his eyes.

"Jim," he said, "you were right. Something must have driven him away. He was just the noblest, best fellow we ever knew, and he's gone on here when most wouldn't have stood it. Something must have disappointed him. Maybe you and I are the only two who really care, so we'll stick up for him through everything, and not believe a word they say."

"Mine is the loss, and I the only one who knows," was Jack's thought; "and no one—no one shall ever guess."

The little boy's troubled face brightened. This gave him something to do; and Jack, remembering Fred's request concerning him that had seemed so unnecessary at the time, took Jim with him and went down to Mr. Carden's room.

All was soon told to Harry, and they obtained from him the sympathy they needed, and went home feeling, not that it was useless to make friends, rather how wonderfully strong a tie it was, and what a power still in their hands to exercise.

"Gone!" The word lingered with Harry too. He could recall their first meeting—the wistful look on the young, unformed face; he could recall it later, disappointed; and once again he had passed him near enough to see it hardening into determination. Now he was gone, and the many things concerning him left undone must remain undone for ever.

Ruth heard the story, and she too echoed the word. Both times that Fred had been to Old Bransdale Church she had noted him with interest. Both times her thoughts had followed him, and she had wondered what brought him there. She thought of it as she heard of his flight, and wondered if he, like the one of whom they had heard those nights, was turning back into the wide world disappointed.

Frank heard of it, and with his arms round Rosslyn's neck, looked up in his uncle's face.

"Oh, I am glad," he said. "Aunt Ruth, I told you he would be a soldier. I knew he would. He looked like it all over.—Tell me all about him again, Uncle Harry. I wonder if he will still be a soldier when I am. I wonder—" and pillowing his head on the huge Newfoundland, Frank let his thoughts wander into all the possibilities of their future career; and David sat by and joined in when necessary.

Dorothy laughed at the universal lamentations when they reached her the next morning. It was a very good thing for him, she said. He would never

have settled down if that restless love of roving were strong in him. She thought, for one who could love as Fred had loved Jack and little Willie, and hate as he had hated Sam, a little thorough discipline would be the best thing.

So they thought her heartless, till the evening, when she went in to afternoon tea at The Elms, and as she paused with Ruth at the gate, said—

“Will you tell Mr. Carden I think I have found out all that can be found out about Fred Fraser? He took my fancy when first I heard about him, and I still think he is a possible hero, so they were selfish motives that sent me to discover what I could. I saw his aunt, the mother of the little boy Philip tried to save;” and then Dorothy told through the story of Fred’s last doings in Bransdale. “After that I felt he was worth doing anything for, and went round to his mother’s. She was terribly unapproachable, and when I got round to the subject, grew so hard, and pretended not to understand any allusions to the final cause of his going. So then, of course, I spoke out plainly, and finally made rather a speedy departure. I met Jack Carter as I came here, and told him. He had not heard about the shawl. I did not quite understand his manner; it did not seem to raise his friend in his opinion. I am satisfied now, and it was worth knowing. You know I always think it rather difficult to do a noble thing all alone, and feel there is no one to

applaud or say 'Well done' even. Mind you give Frank the message; it will please him. I suppose the child took his fancy."

"Dorothy, you are most incomprehensible! Why did you laugh at us so mercilessly this morning, and then go and do all this without telling any one?"

"It was all your talking that amused me," she answered. "If any of you would have done anything I would have helped you. But you see I have satisfied myself there is nothing to be done *now*."

"Now?" Ruth repeated.

"Yes. I think there was before. When first your brother told me about him, he blamed himself for not having followed him up, and blamed Philip too; and yet since then I have not known him make any effort to reach him. From what Jack said to me to-night, I think after the accident Fred looked to your brother; and then some misunderstanding came between them, and his influence over him was lost. I do not know what it was, and Jack said after he took to going to Mr. Carden's room Fred never spoke against him. So you see he was large-hearted too: though he would not go himself, he would not raise his voice to keep his friend from what might be a good thing for him. But I daresay I am wrong, only I often think what we neglect doing leaves traces in people's lives as real and lasting as what we do. We know so little what our influence is, and

how, almost unknown, people are looking to us. We need to be careful in the promises we make, and how we lead others to expect from us more than we shall give. There's a lecture for you, the result of my afternoon's search and meditations. I rather envy Jack his friend; he must have the makings of such a fine character."

Then she went in. And thus some were kind and some sorry; but it was on Jack the real burden rested, and his heart often ached for the boy he had lost. It ached more indignantly, angrily, when the secret he was guarding crept out. Who could have disclosed it he did not know; but he heard it in the workshop. He heard from Jim it had reached Fred's home. Wherever he went the words met him, "So he stole your money? A fine sort of fellow indeed!" Jack would angrily deny it, and then feel he had no foundation for doing so. Fred's knowledge of his savings, his redeeming of the pledged shawl, his strange manner, all went to prove him the thief. He never knew the five shillings lay in Stevie's pocket, and that he was the author of the cruel report.

Harry heard it, and looked grave; Frank's faith in his hero was shaking; only Jack denied it everywhere. "He *could not* do it, miss," he had said to Dorothy. "I do not think he could," she had answered; and sent him home with Fred's image restored before him, not stainless, not unblamable, but true and noble.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LOST.

UNDAY morning broke calm and bright over Bransdale. There was something more than autumn freshness in the air, and the almost bare trees looked winter-like as they stretched their long arms in a sheltering wall around the picturesque cemetery.

The stillness was broken at last by steps sounding down the broad gravel walk. They were almost inaudible, but the air was so clear and frosty it seemed to catch up the least noise and to intensify it. So, as though afraid of the sound of his own feet, the little boy stepped on to the turf, and thus pursued his silent way till he came to a newly-made grave.

There he paused, and leaned against a tombstone near. The grassless mound would have looked bald and desolate, if kind hands had not already laid sweet white flowers upon it. They caught Stevie's eye directly; for with all his faults he had that intense love of the beautiful that seems born in city children, and which no life, however hard and barren,

can dispel. He bent over them and touched them tenderly with his little blackened fingers. He did not know that he was in Dorothy's mind as she had put them there—that she had thought he would certainly go there that day, and so had started early to insure being before him. He lingered and lingered. Something seemed to bind him there, something was moving on the troubled waters of his soul, and almost unconsciously his lips opened with Sam's name upon them. He had had something to live for these last years; now he had nothing: he had had some one to look to, some one who never met him but with a look of welcome; and now that was over.

“Poor old Sam!” he thought; “he liked me, he did; and he didn't forget. He didn't forget even after all them folks came. He said as he remembered what I'd done for him. He liked her finely though, she what put these here; and she weren't bad, she wasn't. I guess I might have just this un;” and he stooped and picked from the wreath a tiny sprig of jasmine, and laid it in the empty pocket of a ragged purse he once had picked up. “She said she wanted to see me, but I guess I won't go. She talked well enough to Sam, but I don't want talking to. It were queer she should be telling him them stories what Mr. Carden told. Well, it seemed to suit Sam; maybe 'twould me if I was took bad. But I don't guess no one'll ever come a-lookin' for me; leastways if they did, I s'pose I'd run away. Well, we've had fine times together, poor

old Sam!" Then he turned away and strolled round the cemetery, avoiding any other visitor who might be there; and finally went back to the town with his old careless way, making impudent remarks to passers-by, and exchanging familiar greetings with any friends.

So he went back to his old life, and soon grew accustomed to living it without Sam. He was an apt pupil in evil, and there were many ready to teach him, until at last his name was far more noted than his lost friend's had ever been; and no effort of Jack or Harry, no kind words from Graham, touched him. There was only one closed door in his hard little heart behind which better feelings yet led a feeble, struggling life, and there he kept the memory of Sam's last days and words; and those with whom he consorted soon found there was one thing that they must never do, and that was to refer to Sam, and they noticed that his name never passed those little lips. He would dart away when others spoke of him, for to tell of what was good in him lowered him in their eyes, and to hear of what was evil made his memory less sacred. So sorrow touched his life, and kindness touched his heart, and he passed them by. Only eleven years old, but untamable, unreachable.

Tom meanwhile had come in for better things. He had found a new friend, and one who had the power to do just what Jack and Harry had tried to

do. His loyal devotion to the one and affection for the other were not lessened,—the child's heart was very large and loving; and when one day he awoke to find himself in another place to that in which he went to sleep, and saw Graham spreading breakfast things on a little table, he seemed to take in the situation quite naturally. He grew to expect the nightly invitation to return home with him; he began to make himself useful—to wash, and dust, and work; and when, on the evening that Sam died, Graham said, "You must make your home with me now, little Tom," he clasped his tiny fingers round the strong man's hand, and lifted his beautiful eyes to his with a silent Thank-you.

Harry was more pleased than he could say. He wanted to pay his board and lodging, but Graham would not hear of it. The child seemed to have made his way right into his heart and home, and to be filling a vacant space there. He could bear with his still wild ways better than many, and he was content gradually to clear away the evil that had taken such deep root during his short life. And Tom *was* wild. He would absent himself for long days at a time when the love of roving seemed to overpower him. He would go back among his old associates, toss halfpennies with ragged little urchins, and come back again using his old coarse expressions and often profane words. Then again sometimes he would meet Stevie, and from such encounters he would

always come back wild and excited; and Graham sometimes trembled to think into where the elder boy might not lead the younger. It was thus no easy charge; and the neighbours were not slow to report Tom's wrong-doings, and throw them up against Graham as another proof of his folly in burdening himself with other people's children. But nothing daunted him, and the love that grew up between him and the child finally won the day; and as his childish beauty gradually faded, and he advanced into boyhood and then towards manhood, his character seemed to gain some of the strength of the one he was so constantly with, and he became a large-hearted, earnest working-man.

There was one thing he never forgot, however, not even when foreman of large works in Bransdale, and no one else ever forgot it either—that his brother was Stephen Stone. It was the shadow on a life that might have been a bright one; it was the hindrance in a course that might even have been a more prosperous one. But he did not view it so. "I might have been like him," Tom would say to Graham. And so, though Stephen's incessant applications for money might keep him harassed and poor, though the sight of his miserable clothes and shattered frame worn out with dissipation and intemperance might be an endless anxiety, the younger brother never failed the elder; and it was to his house that they carried him one day when down in the street,

half buried by winter snows, they found him frozen to death. Stevie's clothes were threadbare and his pockets empty; his only possession seemed to be a ragged purse without clasp or fastening, and nothing in it but a tiny sprig of some faded flower. So he died, still young in years though old in crime; poor, though large sums of money had constantly passed through his hands; every possibility in him stunted, every power warped. Quick, shrewd, clever as a boy, he died without a friend, without a good-bye; his life his own, and all his thoughts and feelings unknown; cut off from every human sympathy and interest by his own hand.

"He might have been so different," Tom said when Graham came to him in his trouble; "and all we have done seems no good."

"God knows whether it was or not," the elder man said kindly; "and, lad, we must not give way if sometimes we have to toil all night in vain."

So they laid him by Sam's side; and Tom went back into life without what till then had been the thing that he had lived for, carrying about with him for ever the sight of his brother's wan, hopeless face. But Graham was with him still; and with Graham's strong hand to guide him, and his counsel to help him, he soon found other interests. Together they often toiled in vain, often for long years waited and watched to save some wandering one.

Tom was often out of heart when disappointments

came, and might have given way but for Graham. The man's power to hope seemed inexhaustible. He would never shrink from helping any, even the very worst, the most completely hardened.

"God loves him, lad, and never meant him to be such as he is now," he said one day when Tom let drop some remark respecting the ingratitude of one they had helped repeatedly, and who had deceived them again and again.

"Then why—"

The words came quickly with Tom's usual impetuosity; and then he stopped, and Graham answered quietly,—

"Don't be afraid, lad; ask 'why' if you will. When He was down here He said, 'If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me.' And this one knows nothing of that yet. Some day when he can leave the drink alone, and keep his hands from other folk's goods, he will learn. And after he has seen the love that could do all that, there will be no more disappointment."

"And you will work on till that day comes?"

"Ay, lad; it was for that the Master died."

So they went on patiently and earnestly. The manly, resolute carpenter and the bright, true young mason were widely known in Bransdale: the tempted came to them, the sick watched for them, the strong welcomed and trusted them, and often the dying asked for them. Just in the everyday work and

the everyday life they lent a hand to their fellow-men, and did in this way much what Harry Carden did in his. His name was often on their lips, and *his* example before their eyes; for they both alike looked back to his unwearied efforts as the starting-point in their present life.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PARTINGS.

“HAT is this all about, Dolly? You have frightened me into coming all this way to see you.”

“How good of you, Philip!” was Dorothy’s reply, meeting him in the drawing-room of the cottage with all her usual pleasure at seeing him.

“I wish you could come and stay with us for a little; but father has filled the house with visitors till I don’t know when. Is Aunt Gracey turning you out?”

“No; but I have been here long enough. It is nothing out of the way that I am going to do, Philip; only an ordinary, commonplace thing that girls like me are doing every day.”

“I did not know you had any duplicates,” he interposed.

“Uncle Joseph is abroad, and likely to remain there till the spring; and then they never want me. There is nobody just now I could well go to—nobody

I could be of any use to, I mean ; and I have looked as far forward as I can to see when next there will be, and the way seems clear as far as I can see. So I am going to carry out an old idea of mine, and go in for two years' hospital-training."

"Two years !"

"Yes ; I cannot go for less, not if I want to be of any use. Don't look as though you thought I was going out of the world altogether. I shall have holidays sometimes ; and, besides, I shall be in London."

"Are visitors allowed ?"

"Certainly."

"But I don't see *why* you should do it. I know you will sober down and change, you yourself will really disappear ; and when you come back, if ever you do, you will be grave and different. It is so sudden. What has decided you ?"

"I do not think I mind telling you. Since I came here I nursed a poor boy who died. I did it because I liked it, you know, and it seemed worth doing. He belonged to no one, and so I could understand and help him ; and, Philip, it *was* worth doing. So it seems to me if there are things of that sort waiting to be done, and I waiting for something to do, I had better go forward at once. I can understand lives like that ; and I should like to be of some use somewhere. You don't know what it is to have no home, Philip, no centre to your life but yourself."

The last words came out in a tone and a manner so un-Dorothy-like they held Philip silent.

"I am sure father would put off some of his visitors if you would come to us," he said at last, looking distressed, and all sorts of wishes crowding into his mind.

"I did not mean that," she said, smiling and sending away every shadow from her face. "Uncle Walter has been all that is kind and good to me. Of course, I thought it better to write and tell him, as he used to be my guardian. He does not mind, I suppose?"

"He views it something like going into a convent, I think; but he has a most remarkable and misplaced faith in your judgment, and so meekly thinks it all right."

"I am so glad; it was the only thing I was troubling about. I would not grieve him for anything."

"Would you not—not if you knew quite well there was something he wanted very much?"

"Don't talk nonsense to-day," she said a little wearily. "I am in earnest."

"And so am I," he tried to answer; but steps were sounding down the gravel walk, and before the words were uttered Harry came in at the window.

"Philip, this is like old times to have you suddenly descending upon us."

There was nothing to mar the meeting—nothing lacking in Harry's cordial greeting, no shadow of doubt over Philip's warm response.

"Is it something good, or something bad, or pure chance that has brought you here?" Harry continued; and it was in vain that Dorothy sent Philip a look imploring silence.

"I came to see after my little cousin here."

"To see if we were taking care of her?"

"I think I could trust you for that; but rumours of a meditated step reached us, and I came to know the truth exactly." Harry was conscious of a sudden fear as to what the next words might be. All sorts of conflicting thoughts and feelings had crowded themselves into those few minutes. He had met Philip with the old glad feeling; then knew at once that something had come between them, that his presence cast a shadow over what had been sunshine lately. He had let himself drift along, never stopping to ask if it was into a possible danger. He had grown accustomed, almost unconsciously, to letting Dorothy become the centre of his life these last weeks. There had been nothing to wake him up and make him grasp the truth. He had told himself over and over again long ago that he was too busy, his chosen life too dear, to think of making any change. He thought so still—or rather imagined he did, till this moment, when theories and plans alike faded, and the great fact of his life stood up

before him. It mastered him for one moment; and in that moment he looked round at Dorothy with something more than inquiry, more than anxiety in his eyes. She saw it; but even if her colour changed, her eyes never wavered as they met his, and her voice was quiet and calm as she answered,—

“Mr. Carden knows nothing of my plans. I have only told you and Miss Gracey at present.”

“Oh! don’t you?” said Philip turning to him. “I half thought you had something to do with it, you are such a terrible fellow for setting other people to work. So you do not know of the proposed entrance into a sisterhood?”

“I am working out an old idea of mine, Mr. Carden,” Dorothy said. “I am going up to London for two years’ hospital-training. I have not mentioned it, because I so dislike my plans being discussed. Philip came down to bring me Uncle Walter’s consent.”

“Came down to enter a most earnest protest against your proceedings,” he interrupted; “and Harry will support me. I know he disapproves of women stepping out of their spheres.”

Harry did not contradict him; and Dorothy turned the conversation into other channels until the two friends went for a walk. She sat still, as their footsteps died away, and what had been on the whole rather a trying interview was brought to an end, and let her thoughts wander. They went back

half reluctantly over her stay in Bransdale; but she found nothing there that she could wish undone or unsaid. She had regarded Harry as so different from other men, and his life so apart from theirs; she had looked upon him as so much older, so much graver than those she generally met; and finding him decidedly out of the common, had pondered and speculated about him more as a character than as a man. At first she had been inclined to dislike him. Knowing the side of his life unknown to the world at large, she thought he would be for ever "prosing about the masses," as she expressed it; and it was only after some weeks that she learned to know that because he had large interests and large sympathies in that direction, he had the same in others. He had not only studied one side of life—what the interests of the poor were to him when with them, the interests of the rich were when with them. "I always thought men who were much amongst what are called the lower classes grew bitter against the pleasure-loving, easy-going lives of the rich," she said one day; and Harry answered,—

"It is our tendency, our temptation; but bitterness never yet healed one, much less hid a multitude of sins. We individualize everything so. While we are ready to take by the hand the poor man dragged low by the temptations of his position, we stand aside with Pharisaical censure of the man who, loaded with wealth, yields to the peculiar temptations of

his station, and thus show a very scant appreciation of the motives from which we imagine ourselves to be working."

It was thus she grew to watch him, and though prejudiced and critical, she was almost satisfied: evil was evil to him everywhere; he hated it, hated it with that quiet, persistent hatred that prompts action. It did not matter where or how he met it; and by his earnestness he would win men to hate the bad things in them too. Even in selfish, hardened hearts he would sometimes rouse the first feeling of discontent, undo perhaps some heavy burden, and set a starving soul free to seek a different life. Thus gradually from his actions she reached his motive, and found that pure and single. She never forgot his own description of it; she never forgot how the one night that she went to his boys' room her eyes had rested on the words that ruled them there,— "One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren." They seemed to sum up all she had then learned of him and his work. There was a oneness in it all. He did not need a fresh motive for every fresh action, a special interest to prompt special effort. He had one motive for every action, for every effort; and thus there was a width in his sympathies and a breadth in his interests which were only possible because of the depth and singleness of his motive.

Thus Dorothy had grown to believe in him, and though she so constantly saw him as an ordinary

man among ordinary men, she still persisted in regarding him as so apart in interests and affections from others, that it was a sudden awakening to find he was not quite so much so as she thought.

It was not this that had driven her to her decision, however. Ever since she first went to Sam, ever since his touching farewell to her, old dreams that had once been only castles in the air came back in a more practical form. Her life was her own, and it seemed to her as though this one lad's gratitude, the sense of the comfort she had been suffered to give him, were calling her to action of some sort. So after thinking and planning she decided. She had waited to hear from her uncle before telling any one; and now it was told, and she sat thinking of the perplexities around her path.

"I wish people would be friends and nothing more," she thought. "I wish you could come and go, and just be necessary enough to them to give them pleasure, and not to give them pain. I wish people were sensible, Philip especially. He's growing unmanageable; it is time he gave up his foolish ideas. I wish he would care for somebody really—Ruth, now, for instance. I feel as though I ought to take care of them all, and yet were backing out of all responsibilities. Well, I have had a happy time here, and every one has been very kind, too kind I think; and if they are going to be sorry I should go, it is better I should be off quick, and then

things will all sink back into their own ways. I must just go straight on. Of course I am sorry, but—”

She stood up, and then went down the garden, ashamed of her dreaming, and working herself into a more practical frame of mind over a rockery she had undertaken to make.

Philip joined her there when he returned; and she looked up anxiously as she heard again the constant little cough that had sounded ominously in her ears during the earlier part of the afternoon.

“How are you?” she asked. “Ought you not to go in? It is late.”

“Oh no,” he answered; “it is too great a blessing to have some air to breathe. We have had nothing but smoke and fog in London.”

“Has it hurt you yet?”

“I have only had one bad cold,” he answered laughing. “Aunt was in her element, and almost doctored me into a galloping. I submitted on the whole with a good grace; but it was such a contrast to the invalid days here. Harry was made to be with sick people, especially irritable ones. Do you like him better?”

“Did I ever do otherwise?”

“You criticised rather severely the one time I saw you together.”

“Did I? Perhaps I have improved.”

She was leaning against the railings, gently smooth-

ing the ground with the rake she held in one hand. The colour in her cheeks was brightened by the cool air and her late exertions, and Philip thought he had seldom seen her look so pretty, and he watched her admiringly as she went on slowly,—

“ I think when any one has to take a very decided course, when they have to throw aside very much of what we may usually expect in life, and yet do it as though they did not ; I think when they go straight on, knowing they are being watched by unsympathetic minds, as though no one were observing them, that they place themselves above criticism. Even if they do things sometimes that jar upon you, it is miserably narrow-minded to single those out for judgment. If they are strong, earnest characters, and you see they are wise and true in small things which all can understand, it is unfair to doubt them directly they step beyond us, and, because they are more bold, more self-sacrificing, will bear with censure for the sake of what they can accomplish.”

“ Is that a lesson lately learned ? It sounds Aunt Gracey or Harry like.”

“ Yes,” she said, looking up from her raking. “ I, for instance, *could not* do what he does. I could not place myself in a position to hear the things said of me that I have heard said of him. And yet he goes on. Of course there is no novelty, no freshness in it now ; years have gone by since he began ; and yet

he is just as earnest as if it were all new, and yet not absorbed. I think—" she added and paused.

"Well, Dolly, what is the final judgment on my friend? You have been lenient, I must say."

"I think he lives out the Apostles' Creed," she answered.

"What do you mean? Your remarks always need explanation."

"So few live up to their belief; they lower it to their actions: every one has his own creed to suit his own faults. Mr. Carden does not. His is a creed men may believe the whole world over; and his practice runs closely side by side with his principles. Say it through to yourself next time you see him, Philip, and see if he is not the sort of man you would turn to if you were shaken and your faith seemed going."

"I am so glad you admire him," Philip said with genuine pleasure at finding his friend so appreciated. "So you see the 'man of the masses' was worth knowing after all."

Then they went in and made the long evening bright for Miss Gracey.

Meanwhile Harry had carried his newly-discovered fact away with him. After that one moment's weakness, he had mastered himself, and with a strong hand crushed into silence the tumult that was rising in his heart. So he walked and talked with Philip as easily and affectionately as usual, conscious that

as soon as they parted the wild thoughts he was hushing would spring up before him and demand attention. So he turned from the cottage, and with hasty steps walked up the downs, and there, as far as he could, stood outside himself and looked at the conflicting feelings within him. He thought, from the first moment he saw Dorothy on the cottage lawn, he had taught himself to consider her as in part belonging to Philip. He did not know that as he had learned to know her better he had let that idea disassociate itself with her, because he could not understand how it should be possible. He had not known then, he did not know now, how little by little she had won his love, until he was awoke to the fact by the sudden consciousness of what it would be to lose her. It was true they had not always agreed. She would try to prove him wrong, and rouse him to stand up for himself; and when he gained the day, would acknowledge her defeat with a bright smile and willingness to yield prejudice for truth that often made him wish he had not battled quite so vigorously. Hours went by, not hours of almost numbed feeling and impulsive thinking, but hours of earnest reasoning and hard fighting. Before him stood Philip's boyish figure, Philip's handsome face. That afternoon he had talked of his cousin more than usual. He had almost seemed as though he wanted Harry to question him, but he could not. So he stood there before him bright, confident, hopeful;

and he gazed long and earnestly at the conjured-up vision of his friend. Then, too, Dorothy had told Philip of her plans, was glad to talk over them with him: it might be more true than he thought that the cousinly affection had grown on both sides into something more than cousinly. Such arguments seem too light to weigh against the feeling that was overpowering him. But they did. He had himself terribly under control. He did what a younger man could not have done. And before he went down again, beside the fact that the love of his life had dawned upon his horizon stood the other fact that that love was hopeless. He knew within himself he had made no effort to win her affections, and therefore he thought he had only to stand aside and let all go on as it had gone heretofore. His might be loss and pain, but Dorothy's happiness was unmarred, Philip's hopes unchecked by action of his.

His was too strong a nature to be shaken by any but a great storm, and the billows of sorrow that broke in upon him as he sat on Bransdale Down seemed to sweep from his soul every other hope and feeling, and for that hour to leave it desolate.

When he finally rose he was not calm, not tranquil, but perfectly sure that he knew and had mastered himself, and he was not afraid to go down into the life awaiting him. So he went back to it alone, and the boys who still flocked to him marked no change; the men never saw him less interested in

their concerns; his work did not suffer, his friends did not complain. Life hides its own secrets very securely, and Harry certainly hid his.

Miss Gracey was the only one who knew, and it was not till after Dorothy was thoroughly settled at the hospital, and Philip had gone back to his father and his work, that she ventured to let him know that his secret was not his alone, and after his answer she never referred to it again.

"Aunt Gracey," he said, "Graham said to me last night: 'I think, sir, trouble has only touched us lightly, if there has never come a time in our lives when out of storms and darkness we have not needed to look up and say to ourselves, "I believe in God *the Father*."' There are folks enough that believe as He loves them, but there are not so many as believe He is love; and it is sometimes only sorrow that makes a man that sure of it nothing can shake him."

"Then you think all will come right?" she asked.

"All *is* right," he replied, "for Philip and his cousin, and—for me."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SOLDIER'S LIFE.



YEARS rolled by,—years in which plans formed had been carried out, hopes had been realized, loss had been sustained, the old had grown older, the young were laying claim to age. Winter snows and summer sunshine had followed one another, and time, as it hurried on, was bringing the world to another Christmas day.

For four weeks a huge ship had been ploughing its way through the waters. India, with its burning heat and ceaseless sunshine, had been driven from the memories of those on board by the pitiless cold and the searching wind, that made the decks like icy wells. There was a hope, however, in many hearts which kept them cheerful amidst much that was discouraging and depressing,—it was the hope of reaching England before Christmas. The captain wanted it, for before his eyes there often rose a vision of the little faces he knew would be eagerly looking to welcome him on Christmas eve. The

officers wanted it, and the ship's company were wearied with their frequent eager questions as to the probability of their hopes being realized. There were little children on board wanting it; women tired with the discomfort and noise hoping for it; and one thousand men, after long years of service and hard years of endurance, bringing back to their minds the Christmas days of times gone by, and wishing for them again.

So the ship went on, like a huge living thing propelled by some gigantic purpose, through the still waters around it. On, on; and the same fog that was dimming the brightness of the gaily-decked shops on land, settled down like a thick white cloud over the sea, and it was in vain that bronzed men stood shivering on the deck, trying to pierce the gloom and catch the first glimpse of the cliffs they were nearing. Hour after hour they stood there; and when at last the huge thing slowly stopped, and the word went round that they were at Spithead, instead of a thrill of enthusiasm or a ringing cheer, the men looked at one another and then out again into the still impenetrable mist that shrouded them, and turned below scarcely believing it was true. The hushing of the machinery that had sounded in their ears so continuously, the almost inaudible rippling of the waves instead of the steady rush of the swiftly passing waters, all helped to depress and lower the spirits of the crowds who had looked so eagerly for

Christmas eve and now had to realize it was here. So they went below ; and the elders grumbled, and the youngers turned out their packs of cards and prepared to spend Christmas without any Christmas cheer. Last among the stragglers who lingered on the deck was a soldier, who, from his bronzed face and rigid features, looked as though he had seen long and hard service.

He was leaning his head upon his folded arms, and the expression on his face was almost as if by the strength of his will he would part the obscuring cloud in front of him and *would* see the shores so near. His hopes as much as, perhaps more than, any other's had centred on the morrow. All the slow resolves and deliberate resolutions of years were pointing to that morrow. A strange tenderness came into his eyes, and a smile that might almost be called sweet played for a moment round his lips. Then he straightened himself up, turned round, and setting his back against the ship's side, folded his arms, and turned sternly from these thoughts, whatever they might be.

It was a striking, almost handsome face, and combined with his manly, soldierly figure, made him by general consent the "smartest man in the regiment." He looked perhaps thirty-two or thirty-four ; but a life such as his soon adds the appearance of years, and there was an idea of vigour and activity about him that made it probable he had not reached that age.

The silence around him was broken by quick steps, and then the words in a ringing boyish voice, "Moping, Fred! And we are all head over ears getting ready for to-morrow. They want a song. Come down."

The young speaker brought down his hand with a familiar slap upon his arm, and gently pushed him towards the gangway.

The stern face unbent, and the fixed gray eyes smiled a smile that if any one had known him well would have told at once that Fred Fraser stood before him. He suffered himself to be led away, and soon the boy's sweet notes were blending with Fred's in a duet, their comrades joining in the chorus.

So Fred came back to England fourteen years after he had left it, sixteen after he had enlisted; and all that while there had been silence between him and the friends he had left behind him. If they had ever written to him he could not tell, for under his regimental name no letter would reach him. And he had never cared to send them word concerning himself. So he had grown from boyhood into manhood; his character had formed, his feelings and ambitions changed; and yet there was a great deal of the old Fred still there. He still carried about with him that proud, disdainful air, and it still stood against him everywhere. He had never been a favourite, never even a friend, with his comrades. He had stood aloof and alone. There were many who feared him, a few who respected him, but

not understanding him they were glad to leave him to himself, and he accepted his position, and held it. He had risen in the ranks; and then, by an act which was prompted by his own keen sense of justice, lost his stripes: and he knew there were many who were glad. Though he daily witnessed petty dishonesties, petty tyrannies, and careless oversights, he never grew accustomed to them; his high sense of honour was never lowered or worn out, and everything mean and underhand was as hateful to him as ever. He was an excellent soldier: no man knew or did his duties better; the interests and the honour of the regiment were dear to him; he had grown to love his profession. And yet he was no favourite with his officers. As a non-commissioned officer he had been much attached to his captain, and had won from him a confidence that had made his life pleasant for the time; but the younger men and the N. C. O.'s disliked him for his conceited air, as they called it, and because they could never lay their finger upon any fault in his regimental duties, he often became a victim to those petty tyrannies and spitefulnesses against which there was no protection. And he bore them, only galling his enemies by the quiet contempt he showed them and his utter indifference to their favour or their hatred.

So the years passed by, uneventful save for the little excitements and vicissitudes of regimental life. The memories of his boyhood faded partly from his

thoughts, but never from his mind ; for with all his faults, the true soldier's heart beat within him,—the heart that enshrines everything connected with home so sacredly and casts a halo of past memories around the mother's name and sister's love. Just as he could never deceive another, he never could deceive himself, so he did not build upon foundationless hopes ; but the love for his mother grew stronger, and the thought of meeting his father and sisters again brighter. And Jack ? Well, all those years the memory of his friend was constant and unfading. It may be that it hindered him from making friends ; not that he consciously compared others with the one who had once held that place, but, having known better, having always present with him the knowledge of something better attainable, it was impossible to take anything second to it. Those he chose as comrades from time to time were usually younger, simpler men,—those it might be possible to help, but never those on whom his restless mind could lean or with whom his tired soul could feel satisfied. So the joys of life in measure passed him by, and left a strong, earnest, fervent spirit wasting itself by its own intensity.

Two years previously, however, his life for the time had received a new impulse. Three new young officers were coming out with a detachment to join their regiment. New-comers always brought a pleasurable atmosphere of excitement ; but when the talk-

ing ended in drinking, and the strangers began to empty their pockets in entertainment of their new friends, Fred turned away and went out. As he walked through the camp across to the band-stand he met the three young men going down to the mess. He saluted, and his keen eyes passed down their faces, and he went on with the uncomfortable sensation that one of them was familiar to him. He was tall, though rather slight; wavy brown hair crowned the well-shaped head. His eyes were large, hardly like those of a man, and there hovered somewhere over his face an air of indecision; but it was a handsome, pleasant face, and, if it gave no idea of strength of character, would never have merited the adjective weak.

Before the evening closed, Fred had heard the name and knew that he had seen Frank Barrett. The little boy's wish was granted—the profession he had chosen from babyhood was his lot in life; and, unknown, a thought that had once come into his mind had also come to pass—he was a soldier, and Fred Fraser too, both in the same regiment, both in the same company. Directly Fred ascertained this fact, he determined to try and be Frank's servant. He knew it was unlikely. He could not have said why he wished it or what was prompting him; he only knew that he did want it, and that by no lack of effort on his part should he fail, and much to his surprise and pleasure he obtained what he coveted.

"You won't keep him long," said a young "sub" to Frank; "he does everything in a set-down way that makes you want to thrash the fellow. He obeys to the letter, you may always reckon upon that; but there are things I'd rather ask the colonel to do than order him and *feel* the way in which he did them."

Frank never experienced the truth of these words, however. Fred showed a different side of his character to him than to any other, and once again his nobler, better self had time to expand and grow; the affectionate, considerate thoughtfulness he once had had came into play, and many good qualities that were mouldering away from disuse sprang up into new life. Something of the affection he once had borne his little cousin Willie seemed to centre itself upon the young officer, while he rendered him faithful, respectful service.

He saw his letters bearing the Bransdale address upon them, and learned from these that the home party was yet unbroken; he would see inside the few books that lay about the names of the donors and recognize them; again and again he would hear his Uncle Harry's name on Frank's lips: and they stirred up the soldier's memories and love of home. He would look at the marks of the things about, telling they came from Bransdale shops, and his eyes would rest long and earnestly on the photographs of the old familiar scenes that hung upon the walls.

And Frank would often talk to him of life and times in England ; and thus he managed to piece together the life that some had lived during these long years. That was the pleasant side. Then there was the other.

That sweet sympathetic power which had made Frank such a favourite when a child had grown into a desire to please. The same feeling that had made him understand and wish to supply the wants of those around him long ago, made him still wish to grant a desire directly he knew of it. Thus it grew almost impossible for him to say "No." He was known as the most good-natured, unselfish young fellow on the station. He was ready for every one and everything. He was known, too, as one of the most liberal and easy-going. He would run into an extravagance as easily as he would put aside some plan or neglect his own comfort for the sake of pleasing some friend. Thus his life soon became far from satisfactory, and Fred soon had the bitter disappointment of seeing him go the way of many of the younger officers out there. He minded it all the more because Frank was not naturally inclined to a fast life, and he excused it all to himself with the kind-hearted motive at the bottom.

He had been sent out as so many mothers send their sons. "It is a life of temptation," they say with trembling lips as they see them go ; and yet what have they done to fit them for it? Mr. and

Mrs. Barrett had known all his life Frank would enter the army; and yet all the preparation they gave him for its special dangers was crowded into half an hour's good advice on the eve of his leaving home. Yet they knew what temptations would assail him; they needed only to ask themselves, and they would rise up before them, gaunt and grim, repulsive enough, but surely not therefore to be confronted by the young unprepared. Perhaps the fatal plea of "*my boy*" had entered Emily's heart and held her silent, and she sent him out into the whirlpool of danger with the prayer on her heart and lips, "God keep you, and bring you back to us pure and true."

So he went; and if Emily's loving eyes, or Hugh's honest heart, or Dolly's pure thoughts could have seen and heard what Fred so often did, they would have wept those bitter tears women lay up for themselves by the way they train their sons. He was not bad, and there was something about him from which everything low or coarse shrank away; he was only easily persuaded. But Fred soon knew debts were embarrassing him, unmerciful friends had got hold of him, and the most constant of temptations had mastered him. And at last to Frank his presence grew oppressive: he could not brook the feeling that the man so constantly about him looked with disapproval upon what he did; it irritated him to feel he knew what he would fain conceal from others. He did not know why he should care, but the sight of

Fred bringing up his boots in the morning would always recall the previous night so distinctly he would wish the man one hundred miles away. Yet Fred was always scrupulously respectful: his young master would often talk freely to him, but he never took advantage of it. It was as a sort of protest to himself against the feeling he bore towards his servant that he took to using rough and angry words to him. It was a sore trial to Fred's naturally quick temper; but discipline had given him self-control, and he never relaxed one effort to please the wayward boy.

So the time went by, and as he grew more anxious about, he grew more attached to, his young master; yet never hinted that he had known him before, or revealed one fact of his past history.

At last a day came, however, when Fred was able to prove his worth. The climate had already begun its deadly work on Frank, and he wilfully disregarded even ordinary precautions. He strained his failing strength to the uttermost, till at last he could strain it no more, and fever laid him low—so low recovery seemed impossible. In some strange, unaccountable way, though scarcely conscious, he always seemed aware of who was near him, and rest came to him only when Fred was there to tend and care for him. And he did so most unweariedly; the time that was his own was given to Frank unreservedly; and afterwards he could only look back upon the hours of suspense and watching as upon some hideous

dream, so intense was his desire that life should be restored.

It was granted at last: strength and a measure of health came back, and with it a grateful recollection of Fred's services in the days of weakness. Frank still kept him as much as possible his own attendant, and one day requested him to write a letter at his dictation. It was a brief note to his father; and Fred wrote it in a round, soldierly hand, and then, without further question, directed the envelope.

"How did you know where to send it?" Frank asked, suddenly awaking to the fact, though at the time he watched him heedlessly.

"I always take your letters to the mail," he answered evasively.

He let it pass then, but as he lay doing nothing he began to observe Fred.

"Did I talk much, Bernard, when I was bad?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," the man answered.

"What about?"

"About Mrs. Barrett and young Master David and all at your home; now and again about Mr. Carden; then names I did not know, other friends of yours, who usen't to—"

"Who used not what, Bernard?"

"That I have never heard you speak of," Fred answered, vexed with himself. He seemed to have become careless these last days, and this was only one

of many blunders. Once alive to them, Frank had noted all, and now asked a question often on his lips, but unexpressed from a certain fear he still had of the soldier.

"Do you know Bransdale, then, Bernard?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well?"

"Yes, sir; I lived there long ago."

"I don't remember ever hearing your name; but then it is a large place now, and of course—"

"We were in very different positions. I knew you though by sight, and Mr. Carden too."

Frank's curiosity was aroused, and he questioned the man closely; but though he answered truly, he revealed very little concerning himself.

"Why did you never tell me before?" Frank finally asked, throwing himself about half petulantly.

"You never asked me," Fred replied.

Quiet but cutting words, if Frank had been alive to them. They had lived together as master and servant: it was expected of the one that he should regard and cherish the interests of the other, whilst that other never said to him, "Where is your home?" or "Who are your friends?" As it was, Frank was only conscious of a sudden miserable feeling of shame; and in the presence of one who had known his old home life, his late conduct showed in its true colours.

Fred soon grew conscious of this, and he used the power it gave him wisely. He would use every

opportunity to take Frank's thoughts back to Bransdale; he would make him remember all that bound him there; and then would speak of the distant prospect of return as of an event near at hand. It seemed to him sometimes, as he looked at that handsome boyish face, that he was the only one in India who cared whether Frank Barrett went to the bad or not. But he was doing more for Frank than he knew. The young officer never saw him without the thought of home connecting itself with the sight; and partly from shame that Bernard might carry reports of him there, partly nerved to the effort by thoughts that had come to him during his illness, Frank returned to his life and duties a better man than he had left them.

It was comparatively easy to him to turn over a new leaf. He had never known what it was to battle with temptation or strive with fiery passions, as Fred so often had to do. He was so little suspicious, so sure that he was always in every one's good graces, it never seemed to strike him as possible that former friends might be less friendly when they saw his life different to what they had known. Life had run too smoothly for him to think great storms possible; he never minded any chaffing, never felt any sarcasm, and won his way everywhere by his gentle courtesies and unfailing good-nature. Fred had learned to understand him too well to be disappointed, and only felt glad to know that he had in any way saved him from shipwreck. Every one had always been so

kind to the boy, he looked to find kindness everywhere; and though grateful in his own way, he treated Fred no differently because of the weeks when they had been drawn together.

For one year this new interest had given fresh impulses and motives to the soldier's life; and then Frank was promoted into another company, and for other reasons also Fred ceased to be his servant.

But now again they were together. And while the soldiers were bemoaning their fate in one part of the ship, the young officers were doing the same in another; whilst through the long day the fog still hung thickly around them, and thoughts from disappointed hearts on shore travelled over the waters to meet those of disappointed ones at sea.

It was like stepping into a new world when the men turned up the following day and found a brilliant sun shedding glory around them, and saw the sloping hills and coloured cliffs on one side, and the distant harbour and many ships on the other, the well-known downs with their red brick forts and the long line of lowland in the foreground. Everything seemed giving them a welcome; and when a few hours afterwards they found themselves alongside the jetty, the miseries of the previous day were soon forgotten in bustle and activity.

Fred more than once caught sight of Frank walking up and down the jetty with one who was sufficiently like him to proclaim them brothers. He would

gladly have lingered near and listened to their conversation, but duty prevented. He was thirsting for some news from Bransdale, and felt as though he would give anything to hear what was happening in the town that held his home.

He half hoped Frank might take the opportunity to speak to him, but he did not; and when he had watched the cab that conveyed the brothers leave the dockyard, he turned back to his work, still letting his thoughts follow them. Was Frank going back to Bransdale? Would a few days see him surrounded by those who loved him? Would proud welcomes be given to him, and the handsome young officer be indulged and spoiled by all with whom he was such a favourite? So thought Fred as he moved about, not enviously, not now with angry feelings against the fate that had fixed their different paths in life; he thought of it rather gladly, and was proud that the young officer could return fearlessly to that home, and was thankful to know that in some measure he had contributed to this end. So their lives parted; and Frank passed by almost forgetting the one to whom he owed a debt of gratitude.

Fred soon found himself quartered in a town that was new to him; and then followed that time of dissipation and drunkenness that always ensues upon the arrival of a regiment in England. Money was flung away on every side; the savings of years were spent in a day; promises that had been sacredly kept

all through these years of foreign life were broken; everything noble and pure was ruthlessly trampled under foot; even men who had won respect all through the regiment brought disgrace upon themselves and others.

Fred stood aside from it all, still wrapped up in that proud contempt that gave him no sympathy with those less resolute than himself. He had always kept to the resolve of his boyhood, and had never touched the thing that had brought his mother low and hardened his sisters' hearts. He looked down disdainfully on those who flew to it with every joy and sorrow; and yet would not associate himself with those who abstained altogether as he did, for though alike in practice he would not even pretend to have a principle such as theirs. He was above taking any notice of a scoff or a jeer; and indeed there were few who would offer them to him, for there was something in the flash of his keen eye and the sudden compressing of his lips that had made many a man who thought himself as brave as he quail for the moment and never repeat the offence again. This then was the front he presented to the narrow world in which he moved, and he went his own way, reaping the bitter fruits of his own self-will in a lonely life and a loveless heart.

He soon found, however, it was a different thing to do this abroad to what it was at home. Temptation was stronger, difficulties were greater, unknown

dangers were more frequent. It was then he gradually began to feel the want of his comrades' goodwill, and his lonely life began to be unbearable. The man that looked so hard and immovable to others was very far from being so in reality. Strong to scorn, he was also strong to honour; strong to despise, also strong to love.

Little Willie Douglas had come into his life to satisfy him in some small measure; but a boy is hardly a safe repository for a man's strong feeling. He had won Fred's regard almost directly he met him, and with his innocent face and clear dancing eyes had brought back to him the Willie of his boyhood. It had seemed a shame to him that what was pure and ignorant of evil in the boy should be defiled and stained, and he had done what he could to shield him. But he could not shut his ears to the conversation of the barrack-room; he could not keep his memory from retaining the words and the language he heard there, nor guard his lips from repeating them. So he saw his bright boyhood spoilt and his child heart defiled, yet cared for him still. Willie was perfectly free from all fear of him. He could do what he liked and say what he liked to the grave man. He would dart down the stairs, catching sight of him passing below; and at the sound of his name on those young lips Fred's stern face would relax, and he would become a boy again for a little.

Gradually, for the sake of talking to some one and

speaking those names that never passed his lips, Fred began to trust the boy with some of his life-secrets, and he brought his past nearer to him as he did so.

"Willie," he said one day, when after a long walk they had thrown themselves down on the grass to rest,—“Willie, I wish you would have done with the drink; you go on playing with it, and some day it will turn round and harm you.”

“And be a sneaking, hypocritical, canting teetotaler? No, thank you, Mr. Fred; I should like to see myself.”

“Has not this month made you hate it? I want to see you a man, Will. How many have shown themselves *men* lately?”

“We had no end of a lark,” the boy answered. “You should have seen Burton and Staggs;” and he went on to describe one of the many revolting scenes he had witnessed, laughing over it with his ringing boyish laugh.

It hurt Fred, and he tried in vain to argue and reason with the boy. Then suddenly he told him the short story of his little cousin Willie. “I should not like to lose you too, Will,” he said; “I have lost enough in my life.”

The boy only laughed, and proposed turning homewards. So they walked back together through the twilight—the fair-haired, fun-loving, merry-hearted boy, and the bronzed, weather-beaten, disappointed man.

CHAPTER XXX.

WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE ?

"RED!"

"Yes." His voice was calm, but the man raised his head hastily.

"What are you doing?"

"Doing? Only turning over a few things."

It was a warm afternoon, and the day of the regimental athletic sports, and thus the barrack-room happened to be empty save for the boy and the man.

The one was seated on his cot turning over sundry things and stowing them away again whence they came.

The boy came up and leaned idly over the next bed watching him.

"Why aren't you on the field?" he asked. "I have been looking for you."

"I've had enough of sports."

"They said you were good at running."

"Yes," he answered laconically, thinking of past triumphs and of many prizes won in India. He had been the best athlete in the regiment; and this was

the first year when he had entered his name in no competition.

It was not only that he had had enough of sports ; something had come over him lately, something very akin to the old feeling that years ago had driven him to enlist. Unconsciously he had again begun to look to find in life something more than with all his experience of it he had yet found. He was dissatisfied with himself, and the longings for some rest in life that had haunted him when younger haunted him still.

It is impossible to live above, impossible to tyrannize over, ourselves too long. And Fred had been a hard master to himself. He had forced himself not to feel ; he had obliged himself to do uncongenial things ; he had denied himself the privilege of looking forward to what he felt could not be ; he had sternly repressed all repining against his position or ambitions in it. But now he would bear it no longer ; his true self broke into rebellion against the false self that had held it silent so long ; old affections, old hopes, old longings rushed in upon his soul, and the strong heart, tired with all the unnatural work it had been forced to do, was bowed down under the conflict that raged within.

He grew weary of life, not only of the life he was living, but of life altogether. It did not seem worth while to go on as he was, and where he was ; it did not seem worth while to face the possibility of

further disappointment, and return to those who probably had forgotten him. From being grave he became gloomy, from being silent he became morose; and the man who had been too proud to let his temper master him was heard now giving ungracious replies and hasty answers. The change was soon noted by his comrades. Fred had stepped down from the high level on which he had so long chosen to walk alone.

So things had gone on, till one day some recruits came down from the dépôt. One of them happened to occupy the cot next Fred's. He was a pleasant, fresh-looking lad, and Fred spoke to him with that peculiar kindness that he had never failed to show to these raw, untrained lads, whom every one seemed to consider it their privilege to do what they liked with.

The attention of one who, with his handsome face and soldierly bearing, seemed to the boy a sort of ideal soldier, won his confidence even if it inspired his fear, and he was soon telling Fred of the home he had left and many details of the life behind him. A deeper colour burned on the brown cheek of the soldier as he heard the lad name Bransdale as his birth-place, and he was soon questioning him closely; but the lad was little more than half his age, and the memories of the one were far at variance with those of the other.

He cautiously brought round the conversation to his own family; but the lad only knew people of that

name living out in a villa far away from Princes Row, and though he said there were a Mr. and Mrs. Fraser, a married and an unmarried daughter, and one son, it seemed to Fred impossible they should be his people.

The very uncertainty, however, seemed to stir yet more strongly the wish to revisit Bransdale within him. The longing for some love in his life, some glad eyes looking down into his, swept away many of the hindrances.

For once he let himself believe that they would be what he wanted them to be—that his father's hand would be stretched out with a glad welcome; that his mother, reformed and changed, would watch him moving about with glad eyes; that Annie and Emma would be won by the gifts he brought them; and that Jim would regard him as a sort of hero. He determined to put in for a month's leave. And it was indulging these fancies, silencing the sickening sense underneath telling him it was all a delusion, that had kept him from the sports that day, and made him stay in the barrack-room looking over what few curiosities and treasures he had collected.

Willie watched him in silence, then suddenly dived down and picked up something out of the growing heap.

"What do you drag that about for?" he said, holding up the little old brown Testament. "I didn't know you were religious."

Fred took it from him. He had forgotten it was there. It opened in his hands at the place where long ago he had placed Frank's gift of a flower to him. He seemed suddenly taken back to that evening, to all its calm, soothing influences, to the joys of Jack's friendship, and then to a sort of faded memory of his own disappointment. It all came back. Then what had followed since flashed quickly through his brain. He took up the dried and faded thing, crushed it in his fingers till it was nothing but dust, and let it drop from him.

"What did you do that for?"

Willie's voice brought him back to the present moment. How could he explain? In those old days when they both were young, the child's soul, looking out through his grave, earnest eyes, had met the boy's, and he had touched it with a sweet sense of sympathy. In after years the elder man had looked to find in the younger the same thing, and it was not there; so he snapped the link that bound the boy to his life.

"It is no good to me," was the answer he gave Willie, and the boy did not know the words had a very real meaning.

The open page was still before him though, and the little brown stain, telling where the flower had lain, guided his eyes to the words he had once known so well, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" It still seemed the unanswered cry of his heart.

The boy was watching him half curiously, half amused, and Fred closed the book as he looked up and met his laughing eyes.

"Is it so mighty interesting?" he asked.

"Don't let them make you laugh at what's really good, lad," Fred said; and the boy dropped his light manner as he answered,—

"Do you mean to say you've really carried this about with you all these years?"

"Yes."

"And read it?"

"No."

"Then what's the good of having it? Mother stuffed a big Bible amongst my things when I came off. I throwed it away. I knew they'd chaff so if they saw it."

Fred hardly knew what to answer. He could not tell this boy to do what he never thought of doing himself; he could not speak to him of what he felt he held only very hazy notions. And yet he did not like to hear him speak slightly of his mother, nor scoff at her religion.

The crumbled flower at his feet seemed to supply the answer, however, and he gave it.

"I knew a boy once, Will, a boy not much older than yourself, and he believed what's in here and acted it out. He was away from home, and had as hard a life as you or I, and he never gave in. I have knocked about and lost a few good things I ever

had, but I shall never lose my belief in those who are good ; for I knew that boy, and he was true."

"He wasn't a soldier though," said the boy.

"No ; but he would have been the same if he had been."

"He'd have been a rum one then, and I guess they'd have knocked it out of him soon if he'd been in our room."

The conversation dropped, but still Willie lingered fidgeting about.

"Fred, could you lend me some money again—only a little ? and I will bring it back on next pay-day."

"Willie, you promised last time should be the last, and I paid for you then because you said so. It's not honest to go on like this."

"Unsay that," said the boy in a low passionate voice—"unsay that, Fred Bernard ; it's a word no one shall use to me."

"You must not earn it then," said the man, fixing his clear gray eyes on the flaming young face. "You must learn to call things by their real names."

"Do you mean to insult me ? because if so—"

"Willie, you are no child ; listen to me. I have known you since the first day you joined. Look back to what you were then, and look at yourself now. I know it is hard, terribly hard, to make even a little effort for the right ; but you have not done that. You

see where the drink will lead you, and you won't keep free from that; you know where some of your friends would take you, and you still go with them; and you know where gambling will lead you, and now you are trying your hand at that. Look at the truth, boy, and say, are you going to ruin yourself? They talk of a heaven and a hell in this little book. I don't know if I believe them; but there is something very near hell that I do know, and it's when a man cuts himself off from everything good. He goes down and down into it step by step at every fresh evil he does. He makes himself so that he only draws the bad to him: he daren't be with any one not as bad as himself, for fear of what they may say; he daren't hear a good thing, because it makes him think; he daren't see the light, because the light is good; he's only happy, only safe when he's so far from right, so sunk and enclosed in darkness and sin that nothing can break through and touch him. If that isn't hell, I don't know what is; and, Willie, I have seen men go there. And they are about amongst us—very devils I believe they are—waiting to pollute pure souls like yours. I can see their finger-marks on your life already—black stains that if your mother saw them she would break her heart to weep tears enough to wash them away. Is there no one you are living for, no one you have given your word to, to shun these evils?"

The boy was listening at last. It was almost as if

Fred's words opened up to his sight the gulf of evil before him. His voice seemed to find an entrance into his heart, and with its ring of tenderness to plead with his best feelings. He turned an almost terrified face up into his friend's.

"I did," he said; "I promised father if he'd only let me 'list I'd never, never shame his name, or let him hear aught wrong of me. Do you think he will ever hear? What shall I do, Bernard?"

"Turn right away from it all, lad; keep clear of every bit. You must not touch it, or it will harm you."

"Not live the sort of life you live, Bernard? I could not. I must have friends, and I like to be jolly."

"No, no," he answered, shrinking too from such stern discipline for the sensitive heart and warm affections of the child. "No; but the sort Jack lived. He had friends, and he could be merry enough."

"But I don't know him. How did he learn?"

Bitterly, bitterly Fred realized that there were words which might then be spoken to the boy which he had no power to speak. He groped back vainly in his memory for something that would make plain the difference between Jack's life and his.

Twice he moved his lips to speak, and then said,—

"Jack kept clear of the wrong because he loved

the right; I have done it only because I hate the bad." Then he went on, "Don't look to me, Willie; I'm not the sort of fellow I ought to be, not what I want to see you."

"But you don't tell me what made him different."

Again there was silence; then the man broke through his long reserve. He knew, and for the sake of the child he spoke:—

"Jack Carter believed in God."

"And you don't?" Quickly, earnestly came the question, spoken by two young lips, but sounding through Fred's soul as a very message from heaven, and shaking it to its foundations.

He knew there was the boy's eager face in front of him; he had a sense that for his answer he would be responsible some day; yet he could not tell a lie. No; but which would be the lie? Should he take those words upon himself, then what was all his past life? What of those years that had passed? If they were true, then all the past was a hideous lie. Over it all, over his proud independence, his haughty self-reliance, there was written, "Without God in the world." Yet if he denied, would it not be casting away for ever something that unconsciously he had carried with him? Would it not make the words he had just spoken of Jack's life unmeaning, and make what was a blessed memory worthless? Thought followed thought; it was as though the violence of the wind but yielded to the earthquake, and the con-

fusion of the earthquake was but silenced by the scorching, searching flames of the fire. Everything seemed swept away from him, everything that seemed stable was shaken and destroyed; and then there was silence, and presently a still small voice.

His whole past life stood up before him in a new light; the sense of some One overruling it grew upon him; the consciousness that in spite of himself a greater power than his had guarded and guided him broke in upon him. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Such was the message, though it came not in these words, for Fred had never read his Bible, but the sense of them came to him, and the strong man's heart was melted.

"Yes, Willie, I do."

Little the boy knew of whose work he was doing then, and he asked,—

"Then what makes the difference?"

"Because I have forgotten. I have taken my life into my own hands and made it what I liked. I worked it out as I thought best; but I have made a grand mistake. I have never done myself and never done any one else any good. And it's gone from me now. My soldier life is nearly over, and who is the better for it? I have been living out a lie, Willie; I have stood up before everybody as a self-made man, and all the time down inside me I knew there was a God, and never heeded it. I have gloried in being at least truthful, and I have been a worse deceiver than any

other. Don't let them take it from you. If your father taught you, believe it, and live it out, Willie. That will give you the power you want in your life—the power to love good and hate evil.”

The boy half understood, half did not, but he was sobered, and in earnest too.

All the father seemed to wake up in Fred, all the desire to protect, the yearning love to save.

“I will try,” said the boy; “I will try, Fred, for father’s sake.”

“Then promise me, Willie; put your hand down on this little book, and give me your word. Say you will give up the drink, your bad companions, and the gambling. If your father prays for you, think of that when you are tempted, till you can pray for yourself.”

“I can’t, Fred,” he said, shuddering a little and drawing away; “I can’t swear to it. Don’t make me.”

He knew Fred’s will was stronger than his, and he could make him if he would. There was no fear, however.

“Then take this little book of mine, Willie, and keep it. I am going on leave, you know. Put it somewhere, and think when you see it of what we have said to-night, of what your father said to you.”

Something seemed to be drawing these two souls very near together: the man’s was hungering to save the lad’s from dangers he saw drawing near; the

boy's was appealing to the man's strength against the weight of evil pressing him down.

Willie took the book and put it away; and then Fred handed him the money he had asked for, and saw him go, conscious that he had more of the lad's love and confidence than any other in the regiment, and conscious too that strong affections and hopes of his own centred round that young life.

"You are good to me, Fred. Good-night," were the boy's grateful words.

"Good-night," responded Fred.

CHAPTER XXXI.

“THERE AROSE A GREAT STORM.”



HE next day was Sunday. The usual grumbling, the usual swearing went on as the men prepared for church parade; the usual mockery and profane jeering when they returned. Fred marched with them and back, paying no more heed to their words or to the service than usual. He seemed absorbed in himself, and he was only too glad to turn out of barracks, forego his tea, and wander away alone. He looked for Willie to accompany him, but the boy had found some other comrade. So he went alone, carrying as his only companions the thoughts stirred up within him yesterday. So the time passed till the bells sounded for evening service. All these years, though every week he had marched with his comrades to church, he had never once gone there of his own accord. But now they seemed calling him from his meditations and dreams, and remembering the time when he and Jack had obeyed that call together,—remembering the day when Frank had

bestowed upon him that long-treasured flower, he went. He had to walk some way, and it was late when at last he entered the porch, thinking to find what still he was seeking—the peace that never yet had descended upon his soul.

The congregation were standing singing, and as the chant died away, waiting there for a seat, standing with the others, Fred Fraser's voice joined for the first time in the words, "I believe in God the Father." Then, when they knelt, he stood looking round for a seat, never heeding he was the only soldier there and curious eyes were looking at him. The pew-opener stepped forward.

"There ain't no room," he said.

"Then I'll stand," replied Fred.

The man looked at him, evidently awed a little by his presence and afraid to treat him in the off-hand way in which he usually fulfilled the congregation's orders.

"There seems room there," whispered Fred, bending down and looking across to two of the many empty seats.

"My orders is not to show the likes of you in," he replied slowly; "but maybe, as you're here, I might give you a seat, only you mustn't take 'vantage of it and come again."

The man advanced rather cautiously to a pew, and was about to undo the fastening. A head was raised for a minute, two eyes caught a glimpse of a soldier's

coat, and a hand was instantly placed on the opening door.

Fred saw it, understood by a sudden instinct the man's hesitation and his confused words: there was no room for him there, they were too respectable. If they let the soldiers in, they would drive the prosperous townsman away.

"I see I am not wanted," he almost hissed in the man's ear, and was gone.

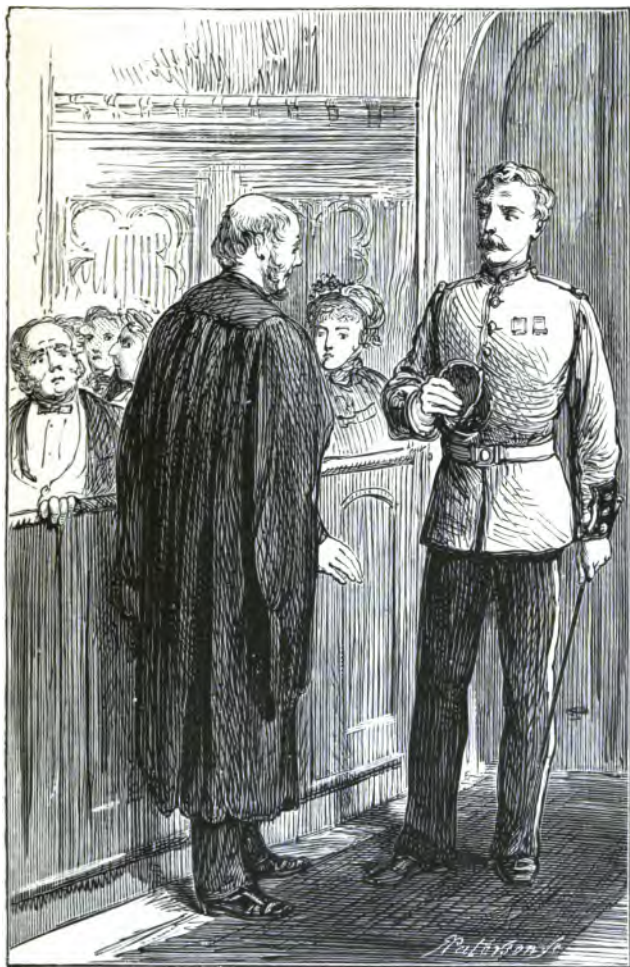
"I believe in God the Father," he had said, standing amongst them, with very imperfect knowledge no doubt, but with a new consciousness that the words were true. But they were counted no claim to a seat in the house they called God's house. Remember the struggle through which he was passing, the very feeble, hesitating hold he had upon truth at all; remember the almost exalted frame of mind in which he had entered the church,—and then understand, if you can, the madness that seized upon him. All his common sense, all his calm judgment, all his self-respect were swallowed up in the sense of being wronged by those whom he was prepared to trust. They were too grand, too good for him on earth! what would they be in heaven? Were there angels standing at the doors to see if men wore black coats or red? Everything unreasonable rushed into his head, and for the time being he was out of his senses. It was perhaps the weakest moment in his life; and then temptation suddenly drew near and with

awful power mastered him. Do not wonder that it should come in such form. Remember his mother was a drinking woman; remember that he knew it was self-destruction for the time being, and he wished to destroy, to lose himself. They had taken almost all from him,—not quite all; they might shut to him the way of life, but the way of death was left wide open.

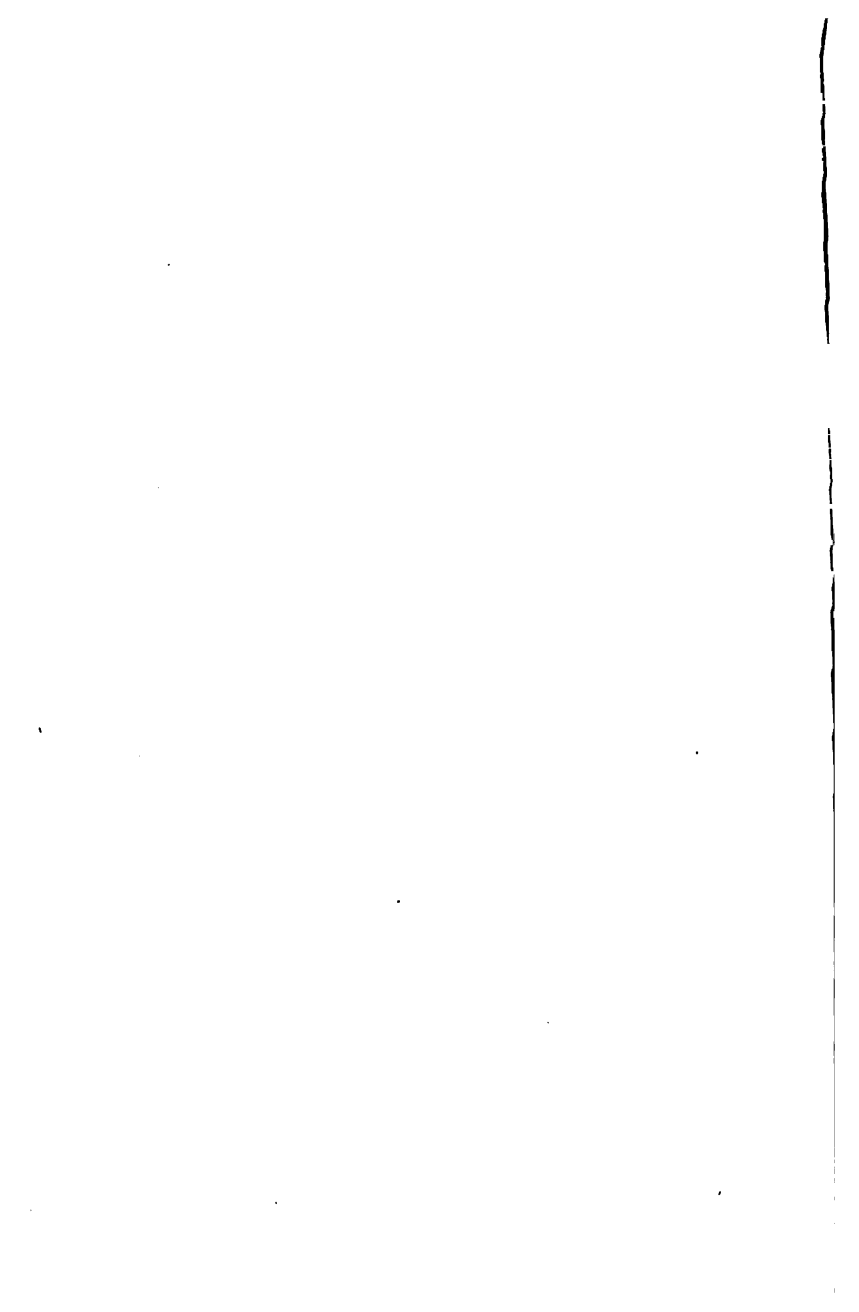
Almost with the feeling that he would get the better of them yet, that his ruin would be their discomfort, that his carrying out of the work they had begun would recoil upon their own heads, he turned as one possessed to fulfil his wild purpose. He knew where to go; he knew that there no refusal was ever given. Like yawning gulfs—very gates into hell, certainly—their doors were always open, and they asked no questions of those that passed in.

On, on he went, the fresh evening air unable to cool his fevered brain, the mellow light powerless to shake his mad resolve. Down through the narrow streets, down to the strongholds of evil he went with eager steps. He passed in through the swinging doors, bent only upon destroying thought and feeling, conscience and hope. Once within, however, he stood rooted to the ground. There was a sight before him that had power to touch him even then.

There was a group of men and women at the far end, and in the midst of them stood Willie Douglas. They had discovered that he had money, and had



"MY ORDERS IS NOT TO SHOW THE LIKES OF YOU IN."



won him in there to get it from him. They flattered him he could sing, and even as Fred entered he was pouring forth in a blustering manner some low, vile song. His cheeks were unnaturally flushed, his blue eyes aflame with the poison he was taking, and those gathered round him looked to Fred like very beasts of prey tearing to pieces some innocent creature. Every drop of drink they were taking had been paid for with the coins Fred had handed Willie yesterday.

It all rushed in upon him—the boy as he had seen him yesterday, the boy as he saw him now, they stood side by side before him; and he startled all gathered there, startled even himself and the half-intoxicated boy, by the sound of his voice as he cried, "Willie!"

There was no mistake whose voice it was arousing him. "Joe" was his name the whole regiment through, and it was only from Fred's lips that he ever heard the name by which they called him at home. Some look of shame, some shadow of remorse, as though the memory of yesterday had not quite gone, swept over the boy's face; but it was driven away instantly. He was himself no longer, and he hurled back at Fred loud insulting words. But in that brief space the man had come back to himself: his own fierce passion was silenced by his anger against the boy's destroyers; his own wounded pride was nothing to the wounded love that was making his heart beat fiercely within him; his feeling of dis-

trust for all that was good was swept away before the loathing and hatred he felt for the sin and evil before him. Never heeding the boy's words, he strode down to where he stood, and the men shrank back before his flashing eye and lordly manner.

"He shan't have me! don't let him!" shouted Willie; and the men closed round him. But Fred cast them aside. Two fell to the ground beneath his blows. There were loud cries and a regular brawl. The publican became alarmed, and with the aid of his barmen began to clear the house. But Fred had reached Willie; his hand was on that young shoulder, and concentrating all the strength of his will in the words, he said,—

"Willie, you *shall* come with me."

Then the boy lifted up his hand, and, perhaps not knowing that he still held his glass in it, struck his friend a savage blow on the temple. The glass broke to fragments, and the blood ran freely from a gash right across Fred's eyebrow and temple. For one moment it almost stunned him; his purpose wavered, and he thought to turn and leave the ungrateful boy. Then he drove the thought from him. There was no one all through the regiment who cared if the boy were lost or not, and he did. In a moment he had lifted him in his powerful arms, and in spite of further blows and struggles carried him out. He saw amidst the crowd which had gathered many who knew them both, and he pushed

his way through them, then placed Willie on the ground, and forced his tottering footsteps to keep pace with his. Glad of the gathering darkness, he hurried him down to the sea-shore, and there tried to stanch his own wound, while the boy lay still in sullen silence.

It was useless to speak to him ; and as he walked slowly back with him to barracks, he was thinking sadly of the wreck of the young life, seeing in it the sad beginning of the end, and wondering how soon, how terribly soon the resolves of yesterday had passed away.

It was only natural an exaggerated report of that Sunday evening should go round the barracks, and the ugly mark upon Fred's face only helped to confirm the worst that could be said. He bore it in silence, and trembled to think of what it might not excite Willie to do ; but, happily for him, he was taken unwell the next morning and sent to hospital. Fred heard it with a feeling of relief, and went to see him there. A half shame-faced smile played round the little fellow's mouth as he saw him ; and then he drove it away, and by the time Fred reached him, looked sulky and sullen. He did not refer to the past, however, and was winning the lad round to a more cheerful mood, when suddenly Willie asked,—

"Did I do that?"

The gash on Fred's forehead had seemed to fascinate him ; he had looked and looked at it, and

now the question broke from him almost un-awares.

"Yes," Fred answered.

"Does it hurt much?"

"Yes, a good bit when I move about;" and Fred smiled.

Then there was silence.

"Fred, I am awfully sorry, only I do think it was rather mean of you to follow a fellow up like that. Who told you I was there?"

Ah! who? Who guided his feet so that instead of throwing himself away as he had intended, he had gone there just in time to save the boy? Surely some One who knew them both and understood the needs of these wandering sheep. A glimmering of some such thought passed through Fred's mind as he turned to the boy.

"Willie, would not your father have done what I did?"

"Oh, don't talk about him," he said. "I must forget; I can't live the sort of life I promised him here. I did mean what I said on Saturday to you, and I did try, and it was just that that made me go there. I couldn't, and so it was best not to pretend but to go in for it thoroughly."

He spoke with that childish unreasonableness that is so difficult to deal with; but Fred had been through it all too often himself not to know what to say, and gradually the little fellow's face bright-

ened again, and he began to talk more hopefully.

"My leave begins to-morrow, Willie," Fred said at last, for he had begun to wish he might have stayed and watched over the boy.

"How long will you be gone?"

"Three weeks."

The boy's eyes were resting on the red scar on Fred's forehead; then came a little sigh.

"Fred, I will try till you come back; I will. Some of the boys aren't half bad, only I've gradually got to go with them that are."

The man's heart seemed to wind itself more closely round the boy's, and he pressed the child's hand in his as he said,—

"I know you will, Willie. I can trust you, and so can your father."

Was it accident or not that as he passed out of barracks the next morning the band was playing an old English tune and his feet kept time to the chorus:—

"We always are ready.

Steady, boys, steady;

We'll fight and we'll conquer again and again."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SOLDIER'S HOME-GOING.



HE great, silent downs stood round Bransdale as silent as ever; whilst below, the busy town was as full of life and movement and noise as ever it had been. The smoke still rose upwards from hundreds of chimneys, the river still flowed swiftly, silently away to the sea; the outside was much the same as when, seventeen years before, a stranger lad had first made his way over these downs and entered the dangers of the town.

There were changes, however, and any one knowing the town would easily note them. There were long new streets of houses, long new rows of shops, and the arms of the town were laying hold of the fields and meadows one by one and snatching them from their rightful use. In one of these comparatively new roads there stood pleasant detached houses; shady trees bordered the pavement, and the gardens in front and glimpses of the gardens behind told of ease and comfort for those who lived within.

Near to the town there stood a house somewhat smaller than the rest, a little straighter, the windows a little squarer, a little less comfortable. The blinds did not hang quite straight in the windows, the curtains were drawn too far back and made the house look bare. A passer-by noticing it would naturally look round to see if there was a board stating that it was to "Sell or Let." But there was no such notice anywhere, and figures passing the windows within, or coming in and out of the front door, told of inhabitants.

At nine o'clock the door always opened and closed behind a man in black, who at once made his way towards the town. To-day it opened with its usual precision, and he was walking down the short drive, when he was recalled by a loud tapping at the window.

"Father, I am sure she is worse," said a young woman, appearing on the door-step with a flushed, distressed face.

"Nonsense, Emma; she was worse yesterday and the day before, according to you. I see no change. I have a particular appointment."

It needed only a glance at his face to account for the irritable, impatient way in which he spoke. Selfishness was written there, and below it the harder, more deep-seated vice, love of money.

The girl—for whether woman or girl it was hard to say—sighed.

"I think the doctor ought to come."

"Annie manages that. We had him twice last month. I am not made of money, as you seem to think, Emma. I cannot run into these extravagances."

"Well, you'll have to pay for her funeral, anyway," was the retort, and a bitter smile curled her lip.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I think she is dying."

"Annie does not say so. It is one of your whims, one of your extravagant ideas."

"Annie is harder than you," she muttered, as, seeing further words useless, she turned away. She met her sister as she went in.

"What have you been saying to father?" she asked.

"I have been opening his eyes to the truth," she said, trying to push by. "I wished to know if he wants his wife to die in peace or be killed by you. I tell you what, Annie," she added, losing her temper and speaking rapidly, "it will come pretty heavily upon you. You shut the doctor out for the sake of the gold you hope he will leave to those miserable children of yours; and if once he knows the real state of the case, you will never have a penny. You think you and Mr. Lacey are equal to him, but I tell you you are not. He's hard, but he's just, is father; and if once he knew the way you take everything into your own hands, and stint us all when you come

here, he'd cut you off without a penny. You may have him under your thumb just now ; but Jim and I know a thing or two, and we shall speak some day."

"I don't understand you, Emma. I was just coming down to give orders myself for Ann to fetch the doctor ;" and she swept into the dining-room.

Emma knew as clearly as possible that Annie had come down with no such purpose, and that her words had driven her to it ; but Annie always managed to do everything that way, and to make all her efforts and suggestions seem nothing.

She went upstairs to her mother's room, and sat down with a book. Hers was not wholly an unpleasant face. She had been an empty, frivolous girl ; but girlhood was passed now, and in spite of the lack of expression, in spite of an air of discontent and disappointment, there was still something attractive about her. Annie, on the contrary, was a striking-looking woman. She had been married for her good looks, and had married for money. There was a dignity about her that made many afraid of her, and those of her own class who could claim her acquaintance felt proud to do so. It was a hard face, one into which, having once looked, you would never look again for sympathy or succour. Her two little boys were conscious of it. It was like drawing near to an iceberg to come into her presence full of anything they wanted to impart.

They obeyed her, fearing her; they were pleased when she noticed them approvingly; but otherwise she occupied no position in their lives, and they turned to others for what they wanted of love and tenderness. Quite unexpectedly, Mr. Fraser had come into a moderate fortune three years after Fred left home. He had moved at once to a better part of the town, and Annie, by dint of immense pains, had managed to make friends for herself in a rank of society that, till money opened the way, was barred for ever against her. Aided by her natural dignity and power of adapting herself to circumstances, she soon improved her speech and manners. She had an excellent voice, and took singing lessons. In every point where she found herself deficient she sought improvement, and by dint of some reading, some study, and much practice, she at last rendered herself able to converse and mix freely with the other inhabitants of Grove Road. The time soon came when her hand was sought and won by the son of a London wine merchant, and she was soon happy in one of the suburbs, mistress of a pretty little house, wife of a handsome husband, and the centre of a select circle.

After this, it became difficult to keep up the home connection. The Frasers were not congenial to Mr. Lacey; and, indeed, every time Annie visited Bransdale, Emma's vulgarity, Jim's bluntness, and her father and mother's adherence to their old-fashioned habits jarred upon her more and more. But both she and

Mr. Lacey were fully aware that every effort must be made to strengthen instead of to weaken the link between the families, for the sake of the future; and thus it became a custom for Annie to descend upon them twice a year, sometimes with her children, and sometimes without. She had always had a great influence over her father, and retained it still, using it well during her sojourns with them. She would point out ways in which she thought Emma extravagant, declaim against the least extra outlay in the way of pleasure or of comfort, and managed to leave upon Mr. Fraser's mind an impression that Emma was useless as a manager, and, in fact, little better than a spendthrift. This time she had been summoned—summoned even by telegram, for which wilful waste Emma was never forgiven. Mrs. Fraser was ill, and the girl worn out with anxiety and trouble; so, as a last resource, she sent for her sister.

So Annie came, and brought her two boys. They needed a change, she said. Consequently Jim had to go and find rooms with a friend, and all the arrangements of the house were turned upside down for the two uproarious, self-willed boys.

Annie declared Mrs. Fraser was only suffering from cold, whilst Emma knew she was dying. The terrible craving that had been her curse through life had not left her yet, and they all knew what had sapped her life; they knew what had made her an easy victim to any disease, and what, now that she

was old, was making her lose strength and power so rapidly before what at first was only a feverish cold.

The doctor came, and held out no hope; she was already beyond his power, he said, and he left the two sisters without one ray of comfort.

She was wandering, Annie thought, when she went up to her in the afternoon and heard her moaning some words to herself; but presently she heard what those words were.

"Fred, Fred!" she cried; "oh, let me see him once again, once again! I have waited all these years. Fred! Fred!"

It was in vain Annie tried to hush her, to forbid that name that was never mentioned in that house. Ceaselessly came the same request—imploringly, as though it was in her power to grant it.

She set her teeth firmly and her face grew harder than ever. If there was one thing she dreaded, it was the return of her long-lost brother. Since the first anger at his departure, since the name of thief had been coupled with that of Fraser, she had buried his memory and all that could recall him. She had taught herself to answer unblushingly, "One," to the question, "How many brothers have you?" She had banished his name from every one's lips; and yet down in her own heart still lived the old fear of him. If once he came back, and got into his parent's favour, what would become of her boys' prospects? what of

her own standing in the family ? All she had worked for so long and so earnestly would be lost. And to this cold heart Fred was even now drawing near.

He had arrived in Bransdale that afternoon, excited by finding himself amidst all the old scenes. It was a pleasure to find his own way so easily, to see the same names over the shops, the same signs on the public-houses. Every passer-by seemed to become a friend, and he looked in their faces as though expecting to see a sign of recognition there. He never heeded that they did stare at him, that his free, easy step and handsome face were winning notice all down the street. Princes Row looked more dull and dingy than ever ; but he only thought of it as home, as he ran up the five steps and knocked at the door. But a stranger opened it, and after fourteen years' absence, it was hardly to be supposed he could find any clue there. He was disappointed, but not daunted, and the recruit's story of some Frasers living at the other side came back to him. As he followed up clue after clue, he gradually heard the story of their fortunes, and at last gleaned the news of his mother's illness. That drove every other thought from his head. He forgot the brooch for Annie and the ear-rings for Emma ; he forgot all possibility of not being admitted ; all that he cared for was to know his mother was alive and there was yet time to see her.

"I drove him away ! Poor Fred ! it was I. Oh, let him come back !"

The feeble moans were continued,—the one wish in the mother's heart, unexpressed all these years, was now springing into new life; and Annie had to sit and bear it.

She had arranged when she came that she would take the days and Emma the nights, so through the long afternoon she listened to these plaintive moanings.

She had opened the window wide, and the yellow evening sunshine was pouring in. She could see it streaming over the downs, casting a haze of glory over their dusky sides, then lighting up the green fields near the river, brightening the many roofs of the town, and, as it were, making golden paths between the smoke. Suddenly Mrs. Fraser sat erect.

"He is coming!" she said. "I can hear him! Annie, they are his feet! I should know them among a thousand! O God! my boy, my boy!"

Annie sprang to her feet alarmed, not only at her mother's commanding voice and the strange words she uttered, but with a vague fear that they might be true. She had heard that as people neared the border land their mental powers sometimes gained in clearness.

She cast one hasty, apprehensive look out of the window, and saw a manly figure in a scarlet coat coming down the drive. She turned perfectly pale, but in a moment her resolution was taken.

"Mother, you are ill; lie down whilst I fetch Kate," she said, and glided from the room. She sped down

the stairs, and silently opened the door before the bell was rung, and they stood facing each other—the brother and sister.

He recognized her in spite of all changes ; but she, looking into his handsome face with a cold, stony stare, checked all sign of recognition.

“ Does Mrs. Fraser live here ? ” he asked.

“ She does.”

“ Can I see her ? ”

“ No, certainly not.”

“ Annie,” he said desperately, breaking free from the power she was wielding over him, “ you know me ; I see you do. I am Fred ; let me in.”

“ There is some mistake,” she answered. “ I know no private soldier who has any claim to entrance here.”

“ I don’t ask you to receive me, if you won’t ; but I demand to be allowed to see my mother. She is dying, they say. I will speak to her again.”

“ And do you think she wishes to see you, Fred Fraser,—you, a thief and a soldier ? Do you imagine it is not by her orders I am acting ? Are you come to degrade us once again ? Begone, I say ! Neither she nor my father, nor any of us, hoped ever to see you again. I came down to shield you from them. You may be glad my father did not meet you, and you would rather I sent you away than my mother. Begone ! ” and suddenly withdrawing herself, she closed the door, and with a beating heart fastened it.

She had known Fred's temper so well in the old days she judged he would turn at once from the house in an angry fit of passion.

He turned from the house, it is true, but hardly in conscious anger.

We have said he was worn down by the long strain of years, tired out by the conflicts of the past weeks, heart-sore with the uncertainty connected with his return to Bransdale, sorrow-stricken with the thought his mother must die and he never see her again. It was with no such feelings as he had left the church the previous Sunday that he turned from the door closed against him. Annie had not only wounded, she had not only grievously hurt, she had broken her brother's strong heart.

"I have deserved it," he said to himself, as he turned to look through the closed gate. "I left you, mother, when if I had had any man in me I should have stayed. I have kept silent these long years, and now have no right to come to you. I don't know why you call me thief; soldier I certainly am. I will trouble you no more. Perhaps if you had stayed in Princes Row I might have been more welcome; but you are grand folks now. I don't want your money. I don't want to billet myself upon you; all I would ask was a few kind words, just to hear you all call me by my Christian name, to take my place among you for a little, to be at home. Mother, good-bye."

Mrs. Fraser was still sitting erect when Annie returned, in the attitude of one listening intently. When she saw her, she gave a feeble wail,—

“O Annie, he is going, going; and I know he came for me. I heard his voice, I could not be mistaken; and I hear his feet now going, going as they went long ago, when *I* sent him away. I, yes I will tell it now,—it was I. I drove him from the house, I made him a soldier. Don't take from a dying woman the only thing she begs of you; don't dare to lie to her. Fetch him, fetch him here, and let me see the only face that ever looked love into mine once again. —Fred, my boy, my boy!”

In vain Annie tried to stop her; she rushed wildly on with a terrible violence, and then, to her daughter's relief, fainted, and her mind was forced into inactivity. But it was no ordinary faint, and she came back to life again so slowly, so feebly, Annie was forced to seek the doctor's aid again.

“Something must unusually have excited her,” he said; but Annie was silent, and there was no one else to speak. So they watched her passing from them, leaving a ruined life behind her. And there was no voice to comfort, no hand to strengthen her,—she must go that journey alone; and her last conscious look was one of reproachful entreaty fixed upon Annie, her last word, “Fred.”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN THE EVENING.

T is harder to be heart-sick than heart-sore, harder to carry about a sense of loss than a sense of wrong. Fred Fraser was heart-sick, heart-broken. He knew how much he had looked for, how much he had longed for that day. He knew now how entirely the hopes of seventeen years had centred upon it. And his quiet acquiescence to his fate was so unlike him, it told its own tale. There was nothing to struggle against. Annie was the mouth-piece of the family to him, and her bitter words had crushed his manly spirit.

He turned from the gate overwhelmed, all the tracing, learning, seeking that had filled the earlier part of the day had only led to this end, and again he stood outside his father's house feeling utterly alone in the world. He had no energy to look for other friends, no heart to seek out Jack, no wish to find Willie's mother, no inclination to turn to Harry in his trouble. Everything requiring thought was hateful to him, and the only conscious feeling was an in-

tense, almost painful longing for rest. He set his face instinctively towards the setting sun, and by-and-by was crossing the river. It is true that then the thought came into his mind—was there not rest there? could not those cool-flowing waters bring peace to his weary spirit? They spoke of death as a gateway to rest; should he try it?

But he left the thought behind him, and passed on. He strode up the steep slope and, never pausing upon the top, went down the other side. The sunset hues faded, the night-mists crept up through the valleys, and still he walked on. The moon shone out brilliantly, and, till she waned before the rising sun, she lighted the path of a figure moving for ever onward. Fields and woods, villages and hamlets, were left behind. He never stayed nor turned till the noontide heat and his own famished condition forced him to pause for a few hours.

“What lies beyond that most distant hill?” he asked, when evening was drawing on again, and he chanced upon a fellow-traveller by the road.

“Ringdown,” was the answer, and at once his aimless wanderings had an aim.

Jack Carter had for ever associated Ringdown in his mind with rest and tranquillity, and beauty and harmony. He would go there with his tired heart and worn-out brain. So he bent his steps thither, and went on with the same heedless disregard of food and rest. Night closed in again, and another day was

speeding by before his eyes rested upon the goal he longed to reach. His tired feet could no longer be forced along the hilly road at a reckless speed, and they carried him more and more slowly; but at last this small haven of rest was before him. Ringdown, beautiful, peaceful, restful, lay below him; and stumbling and halting he sought to reach it. But he scarcely had gained the first house upon the outskirts when, the excitement and tension over, his strength gave way entirely, and he sank exhausted and senseless on the cool grass by the roadway.

How long he lay there he never knew,—it might have been days, it might have been hours, it might only be minutes,—the blank was immeasurable, the struggling back to consciousness such agony he almost wished that deep sleep might have lasted for ever. What roused him he did not know, but he was no sooner aroused than he became conscious that the air all around him was filled with music. He half wondered if he were in heaven already, and listened unable to move, unwilling even to open his eyes.

Presently the words began to find their way to his senses,—

“ So when our life is clouded o’er,
And storm-winds drift us from the shore,
Say (lest we sink to rise no more),
‘Peace, be still.’ Amen.”

He heard each word distinctly, and could he have articulated anything, his voice would have joined in

that "Amen;" but though sensible, he was hardly conscious, and all power to will, or do, or speak was suspended.

Suddenly, instead of sweet strains of music, the noisy tones of children filled the air. The house near which Fred had fallen was the village school; and he dimly heard the feet of the youngsters as they chased one another on the way home.

They seemed to pass him by unheeded, till suddenly his red coat was spied by one of the little ones who travelled more slowly than the others.

"Oh, there's a soldier!" she exclaimed, and the tiny creature walked up to him without the least fear.

"Come away, Jessie," shouted a boy; "he's drunk."

"Poor man!" said the child not moving. "I'll tell father. Father will know what to do,—he always does. And he's a beau'ful man."

The children passed on; and though retaining the power to hear, every other sense and feeling seemed dead within Fred. He had heard the child's words, and some of their confidence seemed to give him hope: "Father will know what to do,—he always does." By-and-by there were steps again upon the road, and the tiny hand of a child guided a tall, powerful blacksmith to where Fred lay.

He was six feet high, strongly built, and gave the idea of inexhaustible strength. His head was bare, and the fair curling locks looked almost out of place

above his blackened, toil-stained clothes. He wore his leather apron, his sleeves were rolled up showing his mighty arms, and the two fingers that the child held were black with the day's work. He was a splendid type of an Englishman, and any one passing them then upon the road would have turned round to see again that picture of father and child. Much as they might admire his strength and manliness, though, his open honest face would have won attention too. He was not good-looking; but there was something pure and true in the expression there, a look of repose round his clean-shaven lips, and a manly kindness in his brown eyes.

"He's a beau'ful man, father; he's dot a wed toat," said the musical voice of the child.

In a minute more the blacksmith was bending down over Fred's unconscious form. He looked over the brown, sunburnt face; he saw the prematurely old worn look; he read disappointment, heart-weariness there; and he knelt down beside him to do as he always did, to succour those in trouble and distress.

He bent to move him, and as he touched him, with an immense effort Fred opened his eyes. He could never say exactly what he saw: whether it was those kind manly eyes, unchanged from boyhood, whether it was the fair curling hair, or the sound of the deep strong voice; but over his whole being there swept a sense of the rest he had been so craving, the repose that seemed to have eluded him everywhere. He

knew that he had found the lost friend of his boyhood, and that the hands so tenderly lifting him were Jack's.

And the blacksmith too, as he met that glance, knew who was before him. The restless, impetuous soul of the boy he had loved looked out in that one glance; and though everything else about him had changed, that had not, nor had the smile that a moment after played round those resolute lips. A strange thrill ran through the man, and he was not ashamed to feel his heart beating loud and fast within his manly breast. By the exercise of all his giant strength he managed to lift Fred, who had sunk back into unconsciousness, and when he had placed him where the air could blow upon him, he turned back with the wondering child to seek the aid that was needed to bear him home. He trod the road in silence, for within a conflict was raging.

"He wronged, he robbed, deceived me," Jack thought. He had never believed it; but as the words rang over and over again he found they had laid themselves very near his memory of his friend, so near that they had soiled its pure affection. He could not drive them away, and they gave just a little sternness to his thoughts, a little coldness to his plans.

"Nellie," he said, entering his pretty cottage door, "Fred Fraser has come back to me."

The fairest, sweetest face that ever brightened a villager's home was turned up to him. He needed to

say no more. She knew him well enough to know all it meant and all she must do; and only waiting to hear that he was ill, was soon busy spreading fair white sheets upon a bed, and putting the little room in order to receive him. And by-and-by they brought him in, and her womanly heart was melted by the sight of his worn thin face. She tended him as lovingly as she would her own little Jessie; and thinking sleep would be the best restorative, they left him presently and went below.

“Jack, what is it?”

The blacksmith was seated in the porch when his young wife came out to him, and leaning her hand upon his shoulder asked the question. Her eyes had read some troubling thought at work, and now she came to share it.

“Nellie,” he answered, “I thought I had believed in him. I thought I had never believed the ill they spoke of him; I said so to others, and I said so to myself. I knew him too well to believe he could steal from any one, much less from me; but now that I see him before me, I know the doubt has been there all the while, and the second thought that came into my head was of those miserable shillings.”

“But you forgive him?” she said.

“That is what I want not to have to do,” he replied. “Of course I should forgive; but I want to believe in him as once I did.”

“Tell me about him,” she said with womanly tact;

"tell me the story all over again, from the time you went from here."

She took her work and sat down beside him in the porch while he told the story over again. It all came back with a wonderful freshness.

"I can just remember him," she said, "but so little. I recollect well the day when I went to look for him all by myself. I was four years old then, but scarcely as big as our three-year-old Jessie."

"You tried to find him for me then, and it was Jessie found him to-day," he answered; and then there was silence.

"Jack?" The soft inquiring tones came through the twilight again. Nellie's work had dropped in her lap, and her husband's fair head was bent down upon his folded arms.

He lifted it at her word.

"It is I who have wronged him, Nellie; it is he who must forgive. When he opened his eyes and told me who he was, it was the same straightforward, noble-minded man that I knew when a boy; he looked trust into mine, and we never trust where we have wronged. He will clear it up when he can speak to us. God forgive me for the cold thoughts I had of him."

And Nellie felt proud of her husband, proud of his unwillingness to wrong any man even in thought, proud too that while the doubts were still lingering round his mind he had borne his friend to his

home and had bidden her give him of their very best.

But they had taken more upon themselves than they knew at first. From that long drowsy unconsciousness Fred awoke in a violent fever. It was not to be wondered at considering all that he had gone through. Nellie went to summon Jack to his side, and putting on her things, said, "I will go for sister."

She went up through the silent village to where the tiny cottage hospital stood. The bright moonlight showed the neatness of the little garden, the beauty of the creepers climbing up the walls and round the latticed window. There was a light in the one ward, and Nellie's low knock was answered at once.

"Sister, we want you. There is a stranger soldier ill in our house, and we do not know what to do."

It was all she needed to say to gain the instant reply, "I will come."

And very soon the two were swiftly walking back to the smithy. Nellie gave all the details that she could, and soon learned she was telling it into ears not unfamiliar with his name. They entered the cottage and went up the stair together, and the practised eye of the new-comer saw at once that Fred's illness was no passing ailment which she could treat as well as nurse. She sent at once for the doctor, and before the morning broke, delirium and restlessness told of brain fever. She saw it would be a battle for life,—the strain upon brain and nerve had exhausted his

vital energy, and he fell an easy prey to the disease that attacked him so fiercely. There was no possibility of moving him; and even if there had been, Jack would have let him go so reluctantly they were glad not to have to insist upon it.

So, through the long nights, sister and Jack watched and soothed and tended him, and bore with his terrible restlessness with that patience only felt towards the weak and helpless; and in the daytime, when he slept, Nellie and her mother-in-law would share the watches, and Jessie would every now and then creep softly up to the door to ask how "the beau'ful man was now."

"Sister,"—she turned at the sound of the only name by which she was known all through the village, and saw a bright rosy-cheeked boy looking in at the door one evening about a fortnight after Fred's arrival—"Miss Gracey wants you."

"I will come," she answered.

And when Fred slept she went, turning away from the road that led to the hospital, and up a winding lane till she came to a moss-covered wall and a path leading through thick trees. It brought her suddenly to a sloping lawn bright with flower-beds and shaded by stately elms, and passing across she entered the open door.

"Did you want me, dear?" she said, entering the room, where just then there was no one else but the one old lady seated in her easy-chair.

"Yes; I have heard rumours. Tell me the truth. They say you are wearing yourself out this time."

"They tell stories, Miss Gracey; they always do. I wish you could see how blooming I look."

"I wish I could," thought Miss Gracey; "for they all say a sweeter face never was seen." But out loud she only said, "Then sit down, Dorothy, and tell me all; the village is alive with curiosity to know who this stranger soldier may be."

So she seated herself beside her, Dorothy Dorian still, following out the plan made long ago. She was dressed in a dark noiseless dress—some called it dark gray and some dark blue. It was a soft, restful colour, not gloomy, not bright, and the people loved to see it glinting through the hedges as she passed along the road; they knew she was there when they could not see her face, and they turned back to their work with a pleasant thought. She had taken off her hat, and the warm tint on her brown hair, the fresh colour in her cheeks, the brightness in her clear brown eyes, made her look what she described herself—blooming. The years that had passed had left their traces, however: the slight sharpness of feature was gone, the slight harshness of voice was gone, and the occasional brusqueness of manner was no more. And something had come in their stead: a gentleness, a sweetness, a steadiness of purpose, and also under it all a slight sadness. Not that habitual melancholy from hugging personal sorrows, not that forced

gloominess from imperfect views of human joy ; no, rather the subdued influence of much experience, the knowledge of the world's sorrow and sin. No one could look at her and feel that they were looking at a sad woman ; but every one in trouble naturally turned to her, for they felt she knew what sorrow was and believed in it as a great reality. There was something in her face that told them so, though her manner had all its old brightness, her expression and movements all their old life.

She had gone for her two years' training in a hospital, and had extended it to five. Then the railway had come through Old Bransdale, spoiled all its picturesque beauty, and taken from Miss Gracey her life-long home. Circumstances had led her to make Ringdown her home, and among the many visitors to her house came Dorothy.

"Miss Gracey," she said one day, "do you remember my old idea about nursing people in their own homes? I have got it still. Not now, because I cannot obey—for I hope I have learned to be nobody—but because the people want it. There are three ill now in Ringdown, and none of them well looked after. I should like to come and nurse them here, only I am afraid it would be too happy."

But out of that speech grew the cottage hospital. Miss Gracey built it, and it became the centre of Dorothy's chosen work. It was in charge of an older lady whose inclinations led her the same way,

and she was always stationary, whilst Dorothy went to the outlying hamlets and nursed the people in their own homes. She had rightly said she had learned to obey; and having chosen that Miss Gordon should be the head, she did not expect to have things her own way, and yielded her own will when the two clashed. Margaret she always called her, and she tried to teach the people to name her Sister Margaret; but they never went beyond Miss Gordon, and dropping all other appellations called Dorothy simply "sister."

There was as little jealousy as possible between the two, however; and if the people loved Dorothy, they respected Miss Gordon and leaned on her judgment. And they did love this one who moved amongst them. "It's her I wants to come to me," the dying would say. "She's as bright as the sunshine itself," was the cry of the old and querulous. "She never sets herself up one bit," said the young married women. "She's good to us; she's been a girl herself not so long ago," the girls would say; whilst the children clung to her, the boys were her loyal slaves everywhere, and to the men she was the angel that kept peace within their homes.

And she loved them too—their gratitude was pleasant, their love sweet; and she never stopped to ask if she were happy or not, nor wasted her time in wondering if there might have been greater possible personal bliss for her elsewhere. It was a comfort

to have Miss Gracey so near ; for besides her house and the vicarage there were no others near the village. But when Dorothy chose her life she knew this, and wasted nothing in looking for what she knew she could not find.

She had kept young, some said perhaps too young, for her age ; but the people did not think so, and her friends wondered that in spite of all her hard work she wore so well. They forgot perhaps that nothing wears down the strongest frame so easily as a discontented heart and a restless mind, and Dorothy had neither.

"So you are winning back to life the man that as a boy Philip saved," Miss Gracey remarked when Dorothy paused in the account of her doings.

"Yes. I always seem finishing other people's work," she answered ; then added, with a sudden shadow over her face, "No tidings have reached us yet, I suppose ?"

"No, none ; but the long voyage must soon be over now."

"You dread the first news we shall have ?" Dorothy asked.

"For us I do, not for him. We could not wish to make these long years of suffering longer."

"No," she answered slowly ; "but he has been like a brother to me, and, since Uncle Walter died, the only one who cared where I was or what I did."

"We have all missed him sorely," Miss Gracey answered; "but Harry wrote brightly from Melbourne, so we may keep up hope yet awhile."

"Miss Gracey,"—the words came a little doubtfully and after a pause,—"a long time ago, I think perhaps the first time I met him at Bransdale, Mr. Carden used words to me of Philip that seem just the reverse of the truth. Speaking one day he said half casually, 'He is the sunshine of my life.' I think it would have been truer to call him the shadow. You know I don't mean it unkindly, but look how often he has taken him from his work during these past years. He has been to Cannes and Algiers and the Tyrol, and now this long way to Australia with him. Last time I saw them together Philip seemed so changed from his own bright self, so irritable and exacting it was wearing to be much with him. I saw Mr. Carden felt it, and the strength he so needed for other things was being put forth to the uttermost to be patient and bright and bracing with Philip. He has had to leave so much to be all he has been to Philip, and go so often from his work."

"*From his work!*—that is like the Dorothy of the old days."

"Yes," she answered. "I knew you would not agree; but it is leaving many for one, very much for very little."

"There is a story in the Bible of a shepherd leaving ninety and nine to seek one straying sheep; of a

long journey taken for one woman's sake; of a lake crossed to bring peace to one tormented soul. I often wonder when men's narrow ideas of God's work will disappear, and some conception of its marvellous vastness dawn upon their souls. Philip needs taking care of as much as any one you could find in Bransdale streets; and could you have chosen any one better to care for him?"

"Oh no!" she answered. "Of course, he likes Mr. Carden more than any other man; and he understands Philip so perfectly."

"Then has not God done right to choose him for this little piece of his work? We look at our Philip's sufferings, and say only heaven-born strength and patience can help him to bear them. Then why not believe, when this heavy burden was laid on those young shoulders, that Harry's friendship and willingness to befriend him in every way were given him too? While we insist upon separating life and work we can never rest. Why should to visit a cottager be God's work, and to visit a rich man not? Why Harry's tender care for Sam Bowler the most sacred use to which he could put his time, whilst over these months of wanderings some dare use the word waste? Dorothy, we are very blind in our judgments of others. A change of sphere is no sign of change of purpose. I think it is because Harry has been faithful with the many he has sole trust of one."

"I think, Miss Gracey, that living the life I live

here, and pleasing myself as I do, I grow to be a harsh judge of others, and very narrowed in my ideas."

"But you did not think it waste of time?"

"Oh no! You see I know them. But some one said the other day that they wondered Mr. Carden could see it right to be away so very much."

"And you answered—"

"Unwisely," she said. "I said I thought he was one who could be trusted to do what others might not, and so hurt the one who spoke instead of making them feel they wanted to be like him."

"Narrow, harsh!" Miss Gracey thought to herself. "If ever there was any one who avoided judgments it is Dorothy. She seems to have a sympathetic insight into motives. Once when Ruth pressed her very much to say some one was wrong, she stopped the conversation with words that often come back to me now: 'Ruthie dear, I cannot agree. He may have received his orders direct, and it may have cost him all that it would have cost you or me to take such a path.' She has learned how dearly we like to fashion our own crosses; how delicately we fashion them, and then bear them so gracefully. Even in her case the outside world sees her life and thinks the cross must be in its constant activity and ceaseless self-denial. And all the time it is the slight discord in the hospital, the constant need of exercising strong self-control, and cultivating that ready acquiescence so

needed by her. So again with Harry. Some think it his cross to have left all he cared for in Bransdale; but I know it really comes in the work now engaging him. Philip's intense restlessness, his often exacting ways, his feeble fretfulness, the often powerlessness to touch the man in him and rouse him to self-conquest,—there lies the real trial. All lesser friends have been worn out; and it is only something stronger than human love that can carry him through the wearing, watchful care required of him. Dear ones, I cannot think of you as more than young yet, but Harry is past forty now, and Dorothy some way in thirty—less interesting to others perhaps, but not so to me; and thoughts still come of another, and what some may call a narrower, sphere in which there is work waiting for you to do."

Dorothy's thoughts and Miss Gracey's had gone wide apart during the silence, and they both started as the servant came in with the letters.

"From Ruth," Dorothy said, taking up a foreign envelope.

"Read it to me," Miss Gracey replied, for her failing eyesight made her unable to distinguish writing any more. So Dorothy read, and they smiled together over Ruth's bright descriptions of her little ones and her charming house and surroundings, and the perfect happiness of her life.

"It does one good to have news like this," Dorothy said, refolding it.

"Dear little Ruth," Miss Gracey replied; "it is difficult to picture it all."

"It all sounds so restful, and—" Dorothy stopped.

"And Ruthie has had so few storms, you think she can hardly appreciate it?"

"I hardly went as far as that. I suppose some people learn their life-lessons one way and some another."

"You *are* tired, Dorothy. I thought you were. You must come to me and rest a little."

"No, no," she answered, "I am not tired that way. Do you know, Miss Gracey, what it is to have thought you were settled for life, and then suddenly to get a feeling that after all you were deceiving yourself, and that it was all only a waiting-time for something else? Do you know the restless, uncertain feeling it gives?"

"Yes, dear," she answered; and then Dorothy interrupted her.

"You have made me feel like I did at twenty, sitting here in the twilight, and I am a woman with life half over. Forget that little, discontented speech, please. I often think I am too happy. I have just the place in life I once wanted, just the work I always wished, and you to come to any and every day. Good-bye, Aunt Gracey. I shall not come to you in the evening again."

So she rose up and went, and Miss Gracey's thoughts followed her; it was so seldom she spoke of

herself. Year after year she had gone on, and her ever ready sympathy made others forget her as she forgot herself. Only as her character grew more strong, more gentle, more tender, those who knew her best thought only suffering or sorrow of some sort could so mould it. To-night to Miss Gracey she seemed not only tired but tired out.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

“THERE WAS A GREAT CALM.”



HE fever that had raged so fiercely rolled back, and Fred, weak, almost lifeless, was left on the border land, and the watchers were powerless to say whether life or death lay before him.

Margaret Gordon had left the at present empty hospital to come down and help her younger friend. Nellie was busy preparing beef-teas and jellies, and keeping the house quiet. Jack had stopped work for a few hours, and had taken Jessie out with him; and as the neighbours passed to and fro they slackened their speed and looked curiously up at the open window where they guessed the soldier lay.

There was no change when the evening came, and they dreaded the night for him. Many times the flickering flame seemed expiring; and then hope revived again; and gradually, as the day dawned and the morning began to pass away, it grew more steadily, till at last there was a conscious gleam, and the opening eyes rested on Jack.

"You must go," said Dorothy, fearing the desire to speak might excite Fred; and Jack went down to Nellie.

Then the long, slow time of convalescence began, and the circumstances seemed gradually to dawn upon Fred. He hardly ever asked any questions, and never referred to what had brought him there. He seemed to have shut out his past; and they waited to know the strange story that lay between his disappearance from Bransdale and his coming there, but as he lay quiet and silent they felt that he was happy. He would follow Jack about with his eyes, as though reconciling boy and man in his mind; he would smile a welcome to little Jessie, and look gratefully at Nellie; whilst for Dorothy he felt that gentle reverence that made her presence in his room a source of contentment and repose in itself. It was just his excessive weakness that made him so passive, however, and directly strength began to return, he would seize upon it and exhaust himself by trying to use it. It was hard for him not to be irritable, hard not to let his impetuous nature get the upper hand; and Jack and Dorothy, seeing how hard, lent him all the aid they could.

The day came, however, when at last he was strong enough to look back into the past, to gather up all the details of what now seemed so far in the distance, and to tell them to Jack; and as he turned leaf after leaf of his past history and showed it to

his friend, the giant blacksmith's heart grew sad at the thought of the hard, lonely life that had been Fred's, whilst so much of happiness and prosperity had been his. He started as he heard of the part Stephen Stone had played in their history. His promise to Sam regarding the wild little fellow, his own ceaseless efforts to save him, and the repulses with which he was always met, flashed back upon him, and what had so long been a mystery was cleared. The little hands that had stolen the one had surely stolen the other sum. Fred stood before him cleared from the long inexplicable fault, and his self-sacrifice for his mother in the pure light of the noble motive that had moved him.

Then Jack, too, had his tale to tell of unwearied kindness from Harry Carden; of reunion with the mother he had left; of long years of toil in Bransdale; of prosperity; of the accomplishment of his long-cherished desire to return to his father's home. Then, in softer tones, of the day when his former master came down to the Bransdale forge leading his tiny daughter, still in her pink print frock, but with black ribbons tying up her sleeves and round her waist; of how, since Nellie's mother had died, she seemed to have taken her place in Jack's heart; of the long years of waiting whilst she was at school, and then at service with Mrs. Barrett; and then how gladly he had claimed her four years ago. How her stern father had been won from the drink that

made him so stern, and had ended his days leaving bright memories behind him; slight glimpses of the good he had done and the true friend he had been to Bransdale boys and men; little unconscious hints of how in Ringdown the smithy was the centre of much that was good and active, and Jack and his wife were every one's friend and every one's helper.

There was silence as the men's voices ceased. The contrast between the rugged bareness of one life and the happy usefulness of the other seemed almost too marked, and they pondered on each other's as they sat speechless. Then at last Fred spoke.

"Jack, where did you get that?" His eyes were resting, as they often had rested, upon the old illuminated text that Jack had taken from Fred's room long years ago. He had wondered to see so familiar a thing opposite to him, but had not asked whence it came till now.

"From your room," he answered.

"And you have kept it all these years?"

"Yes."

Silence again.

"It looks like a picture of our two lives, Jack—yours the calm, and mine the storm."

"What makes the difference, I wonder?" Jack said, thinking not of the picture but of their varied experiences.

"I think the words in the middle," Fred answered quietly.

Then they heard Dorothy's step upon the stair; but in spite of her presence, brave as in the old days to say any word he thought needed, Jack answered,—

"That voice is not silent yet, Fred; it can calm storms still with all its old power."

And then he went down; and Dorothy, seeing something was moving the hearts of both the friends, never spoke a word till Fred spoke to her.

"Sister," he said, "one day when I was very ill I heard you singing to me soft and low. Would you do it again?"

And she did it at once, guided perhaps by the words she had caught as she came up the stairs to the very hymn Fred had heard the children singing as he came into Ringdown. When she stopped he had turned his face from her and had covered it with his hand.

From that day he began to talk to her now and then of all the many thoughts that were passing through his brain, and began to learn from her. Little by little she helped to clear away the mists that made so much in his life look dark and incomprehensible. The storm billows had wrung the cry from his lips, "Save, Lord; I perish;" and the answer of "Peace" was breaking on his ears, till in the soldier's heart there was "a great calm."

Dorothy's watching soon ceased to be necessary, and she only paid a daily visit to see how her patient was getting on.

Great were Jessie's rejoicings when the "beau'ful man" was able to put on his red coat and come downstairs; and though it was only to rest for a short time upon the sofa, shattered and worn, it was a certain step towards recovery. His leave had been extended after all due inquiries and representations; and Jack and Nellie were already beginning to think sadly of the time when they must be willing to see Fred return to his regiment again.

The first time Fred was able to go into the smithy he entered unobserved. Jack was hard at work, bringing down the hammer with tremendous blows on the cooling metal. He was wielding his herculean strength to the uttermost, and Fred stood silently admiring him. Clang, clang came the hammer, and as Fred listened it gradually seemed to be beating time to the old tune that had once drawn them together. In the first pause Fred gently whistled it, trilling out the notes with something of their old clearness.

Jack turned instantly, with the old bright smile and glad look in his eyes. "You took me back seventeen years," he said. "I never hear that without the first sight of you and the after-life coming back like yesterday."

"Nor I," answered Fred. "All the world round it has been like a voice reminding me of home and something better."

When Fred went back he found Dorothy come to see him.

"You will be going back soon now?" she asked.

"Yes, early next week," he answered. "I am bound to go as soon as I can travel."

"And how much longer must you serve?" she asked.

"Four years," he answered.

A picture rose before her of the lonely man going out again into his hard life, and of the giant father and sweet young mother and pretty child who had sheltered him so long waving farewells from their cottage door. It looked cold and loveless, and almost without thinking she asked,—

"Are you not sorry it is not all over?"

"I am a soldier," he answered, "and I like my life. I would not be anything else if I could. And besides, there is something waiting for me there. The little boy Willie may want me perhaps. I tried to save him, and made a mistake; I shall know better what to do now." Then he went on: "I have never thanked you for it all, but I know you have not thought me thankless, and you know all you have been and done for me; but I should like you to know what a difference anything such as you do can make in a whole life. I used to laugh at it at Bransdale. I used to see how bad the people were that Mr. Carden cared so about, and so disbelieved in all he did being much good. But it tells in the end. It leaves something in their lives they can never forget; it makes them believe in God. I know it now; I have seen

it over and over again in the regiment, and have felt it in my own life. I think having friends to trust, and such an one as Mr. Carden to look after him, helped Jack; and it was cutting myself off from them all that sent me to the bad. I do not for a minute say it was that altogether, but hard hearts are made by want of that as well as by discomfort at home. What you do here seems just the same sort of work as when I was a youngster, only perhaps more wonderful still. It must cost you something, miss; but, if you won't mind my being so bold, I think it is worth it all. I've thought of it both ways. First, that it was hard and selfish of us to feel glad you were spending your life as you are, and living so lonely, and going about always amongst us rough people; that we'd no right to expect what we do of you, or to look to you to care about our troubles. Then afterwards,—it was one day when you were reading,—I thought perhaps you had found the reason for it all in that little Bible of yours, and you did it because He did it; and whenever you came you seemed to bring the thought of better things with you. I could not tell what you have done for me. As I told you, I did believe in God, but I knew no more, and no thought of a love that could stoop so low as to die ever came to me. I knew the story, I suppose, but I never knew the reason; I only know, if you talk to others as you have talked to me, if you can undo the heavy burden of doubt, and take men

right away outside everything to find there is some One caring whether we perish or not, that no angel could be doing God's work more directly."

Dorothy let him go on, for she saw his mind was full, and she was touched by the way in which he had thought. She often had to bear with the ingratitude that takes so easily and demands so much; and though she never wished for it, it was pleasant to be thanked, to see this man trying with a thoughtful refinement to give her the only thanks that would be welcome — the knowledge that her work was valued, and that she had succeeded in what she had tried to do. It seemed a reward to her for much that had been difficult lately, and it was encouraging to know her lesson was in part learned. It seemed to make her work dearer, and the sense of it being worth doing more strengthening.

"Thank you, Fraser," she answered; and before she could add more Nellie came in from her seat in the porch.

"Sister," she said, "Mr. Carden is coming down the road."

"Good-bye," she said, and the soldier saw that her face and lips were pale as she rose and left them. She knew what it meant. The ship that should have brought two had only brought one home. Harry had come to tell her that Philip Langton was dead.

He met her at the rustic gate, and all thought of themselves was lost in that of the one who had gone

from them. Dorothy would hear every detail. He was her only near relation, she said, and it was her due. So Harry told her all, gave her his last messages; and then they turned to go to Miss Gracey with their sorrow.

"Sister, mother wants you," said a breathless child breaking in upon them as they neared the house. "Polly has scalded herself."

"Would Sister Mar—" she began, for the first time in her life, then turned at once and took the rosy hand in hers. "I will come, dear," she said; and then to Harry, "Miss Gracey will want to hear all you have told me." Then she went; and Harry sat down on the wall and watched the retreating figures till they were out of sight, hearing the child's voice still ringing in his ears, "Sister, mother wants you."

He turned at last and went in to tell how the blue waves now rolled over Philip Langton; to speak of his patience, his gentleness; to repeat the messages trusted to him. And there was no one to tell the other side—no voice to speak of Harry's devoted self-sacrifice, of his unwearying love, of the straining of every power to be to Philip all that he needed, and yet never to suffer any unmanly weakness, never to spoil him or let him grow morbid or self-pitying. There was no one to tell of this, but those who knew Harry Carden knew it would be so.

"Dorothy will grieve; you must tell her gently," Miss Gracey said; and he answered,—

"She knows, and is now tending a little child who is burned."

Miss Gracey turned her head, but her almost sightless eyes could not see the expression on his face.

"How like her," she said gently, "how like her! to carry her sorrow with her to the house of a suffering one, and only to let it make her more loving, more patient there;" and then she added, "Philip was very fond of her."

"More than fond," Harry answered briefly, and there was silence till Miss Gracey asked,—

"And what shall you do now?"

"Go back to the old life and try to take up the broken thread."

"Go back to it alone?"

But no answer came to that question, and again there was silence, whilst the twilight deepened and the summer tints faded from the sky. Presently Harry rose up and went out, and paced up and down the gravel path outside.

He looked aged, and wore almost the appearance of a weather-beaten soldier. His face was bronzed, and his dark eyes more deeply set. There were streaks of gray in the black hair; and though just as erect, just as free and easy in his movements, he would have passed for fifty as easily as forty. There was still the same manly resolute face, however, the same genial smile, still the same manner that had won the trust of all and the love of not a few. As it

grew later, he put on his hat and went down through the village again.

Jack and Fred were seated in the porch talking of the approaching parting. They were looking back and in the silent twilight speaking of the past, tracing as far as they could the power that had moulded their lives so differently.

"She read me lines the other day that took hold of me," Fred said, and then in his musical voice repeated,—

"Trust Him to govern then ;
No king can rule like Him :
How wilt thou wonder when,
Thine eyes no longer dim,
To see those paths which vex thee,
How wise they were and meet ;
The works which now perplex thee,
How beautiful, complete !"

They neither spoke after that, till the sound of footsteps passing up the road made Fred ask,—

"Who is that ?"

"It is Sister Dorothy and Mr. Carden going up to Miss Gracey's together," Jack answered.

A light came into the soldier's eye, and he looked after them long and earnestly.

"And there was a great calm." The words seemed to drop from him unawares, and to startle him as they did Jack. "I was thinking of the old picture," he said. "It seems as though ever since I saw him last life had been one long storm ; and now the calm

has come. And maybe it is the same for him and for her—they have toiled through many rough nights. I can look back now and see how He was governing all my life,—not only say but see it,—and all has been well."

"All?" questioned Jack, for there was one circumstance that he had only referred to once.

"Yes, all—even the closing of the doors of my home against me; for it sent me to you, Jack, and to Sister Dorothy, and to—"

There was a pause; the soldier's voice failed him, and in the silence the sweet voices of mother and child came through the open door. Jessie was ending her evening prayer, and they heard the words, "For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen."

They turned their faces, and through the open doorway saw the white-robed child kneeling by her mother. Again the lisping tones reached them,—

"Grant us thy peace throughout our earthly life,
Our balm in sorrow and our stay in strife;
Then, when thy voice shall bid our conflict cease,
Call us, O Lord, to thine eternal peace."

And uncovering their heads the men said gently, "Amen."

THE END.

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